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The Life and Political Ideas of Grand Vezir Said Halim Pasha*

Michelangelo Guida**

The Life and Political Ideas of Grand Vezir Said Halim Pasha

This paper briefly examines the life of the Ottoman statesman Said Halim Pasha and focuses more extensively on his political ideas, stressing the Pasha's criticisms of Europe and his attempts to propose an Islamic alternative system. Despite the great influence that European political thought had on Said Halim Pasha, he advocated the use of original ideas for political reforms; however, these ideas appeared when the Islamist movement debacle was already in the making. Although his importance was realized many years later in Turkey, Said Halim Pasha's ideas are valuable but contain some incongruities with the contemporary understanding of democracy and human rights.

Key Words: Said Halim Pasha, democracy, islamism, politics, society.

Mehmet Said Halim Pasha is a fascinating Ottoman and Islamist author: he was a member of the Egyptian 'royal' family and he held several crucial political positions in Istanbul, including the Grand Vizierate in 1913. This paper will briefly examine his life and then will focus more extensively on his political ideas, stressing the Pasha's criticisms of Europe and attempts to propose an Islamic alternative system. Despite the great influence that European political thought had on Said Halim Pasha, he advocated the use of original ideas for political reforms; however, these ideas appeared when the Islamist movement debacle was already in the making. His importance was realized many years later; yet his ideas still contain incongruities with the contemporary understanding of democracy and human rights.

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** Associated Prof., Fatih University, Department of Public Administration.

Said Halim Pasha and Islamism

Said Halim Pasha was an exponent of the *İslâmcılık* (Islamist) movement that emerged in the second half of the nineteenth-century in the Ottoman Empire and which was to develop in the Second Constitutional Era.¹ In a clear statement the Pasha stresses his belief in the superiority of Islam:

We believe that Islam's moral, social, and political norms are perfectly in harmony with human nature and are consonant with it, and able to give order to life until the Day of Judgement and to the destiny of Adam's Sons. [...]

Because of this belief, we cannot accept that the development of Muslims can occur outside the principles of Islam. Our belief is as sound as the laws of mechanics.²

Indeed, many characteristics of the Islamist movement can also be found in the works of the Pasha. The first is an Islamist stand toward Europe. *İslâmcılık* was certainly a movement in reaction to the European modernization model. However, it represented an Islamic movement born “as a reaction against modernity, but more profoundly they [Islamist authors] are also an expression of modernity”;³ this is true in the sense that they were looking for an Islamic formula for the modernization and development of the Ottoman Empire, but their ideas emerged from a reformed education system and a new political environment.

Certainly European modernization represented a great source of inspiration, yet Europe also had a frightening face—with the colours of Imperialism, which was threatening the existence of the Empire, as well as (in their perception) Islam. As we will see, Said Halim Pasha was strongly influenced by Europe; however, he criticized the European capitalistic system and recognized that many Western countries were hostile to the Ottoman and Muslim world.

Despite the fact that the Pasha was a determined *İslâmcı* (Islamist), who believed in the primary role of Islam for providing a solution to social and political issues in the Muslim world, Said Halim Pasha used a very ‘secular’ discourse. Indeed, as with all the Islamist authors who were his contemporaries, we rarely encounter references to Islamic resources or the thoughts

1 Mümtaz'er Türköne, “İslâmcılık,” *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Ansiklopedisi* (DİA), 2001, XXIII, 60-2.

2 Said Halim Pasha, *Buhranlarımız ve Son Eserleri*, edited by M. Ertuğrul Düzdağ (Istanbul: İz, 2003), 179.

3 Ira M. Lapidus, “Islamic Revival and Modernity: the Contemporary Movements and the Historical Paradigms,” *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* (JESHO), XL, 4 (1997), 444.

of the main Muslim authorities in his writings. The Islamist authors were usually not members of the *ilmiye* but rather were educated in the modern Ottoman education system. Said Halim Pasha and his younger brother Mehmet Abbas Halim were sent to Switzerland to complete their education; here they studied political sciences for four years. Other prominent Islamist authors were trained in Istanbul in modern sciences—for example, Mehmed Âkif (Ersoy) completed veterinary school. Others participated in the classical *medrese* education system with a newly established curriculum—like Seyid Bey who also completed the *Hukuk Mektebi* (law school). Thus, the new education system led to the emergence of a new Muslim elite in the Empire as well as new approaches to religion. Moreover, what Eickelman says about the 1980s Gulf countries seems to be appropriate to this period of history as well:

With this transformation, religious authority shifts from elite specialists recognized as masters of religious texts and often inaccessible rhetorical forms to religious and political activists who seek open religious discussion and action and, whose authority is based upon persuasion and the interpretation of accessible texts.⁴

Indeed, *İslâmcılık* was attempting not only to introduce a revival of Islam, but also a new approach to religion; this implied a reinterpretation of religion and a spread of its lost values through a discourse that was now based on reasoning and persuasion, that is, one that was more suitable to the modern educated elites of the Empire. However, this new methodology was ‘secular’ and marginalized old scholars and traditions.

Another important characteristic of Said Halim Pasha is that he was an intellectual while also having wide political experience. His experience provided him with the necessary pragmatism and strength to formulate political proposals.

However, it is extremely difficult to estimate his influence on the intellectual debate and on Turkish Islamist writers of the era.

Said Halim has not only been dismissed as an ineffective statesman, but his work also has remained buried. His Egyptian princely pedigree, his preference for French over Ottoman Turkish in his writings, his staunch and methodical defence of Islam as the basis of the state, and his association with the Unionist *bêtes noires* made him an unlikely candidate for Republican veneration.⁵

4 Dale F. Eickelman, “Mass Higher Education and the Religious Imagination in Contemporary Arab Societies,” *American Ethnologist*, XIX, 4 (1992), 652.

5 Hasan Kayalı, “Islam in the Thought and Politics of Two Late Ottoman Intellectuals: Mehmed Akif and Said Halim,” *Archivum Ottomanicum*, XIX (2001), 309.

Despite the fact that some of his works were translated and published by Mehmed Âkif,⁶ a family friend and a famous Islamist writer, as İsmail Kara notes, “Said Halim Pasha was an original thinker, but without influence.”⁷ It was only after his death, forty years after the establishment of the Republic that Ottoman and Turkish translations of his works spread among Islamist intellectuals. For instance, the most esteemed modern Turkish Muslim jurist, Hayrettin Karaman, lists *Buhranlarımız* as being the first texts he read as a student in the newly- opened schools for imams and preachers in the 1960s.⁸ However, the first edition in modern Turkish of the Pasha’s works was published in 1966 by Hüseyin Rahmi Yananlı and then again in 1973 by Ertuğrul Düzdağ.⁹

Certainly, we know that the pasha had an influence outside Turkey—probably because of the fact that his works were available in French and soon afterwards in English. Muhammad Iqbal, who remembers Said Halim alongside the better-known Jamal al-Din al-Afghani in his *Javid Nama*:

The Sage of Rum, in rapture continually, his face radiant with an ecstasy of joy, said, “The East never gave birth to two better sons—the plucking of their nails unravelled our knots: Maulana Jamal, Sayyid of all Sayyids, whose eloquence gave life to stone and sherd, and passionate [Said] Halim, commander of the Turks whose thoughts matched the loftiness of his station. To offer prayer with such men is true devotion, a labour else whose hoped-for wage is Paradise.”¹⁰

Moreover, a modified version of his work *İslamlaşmak* (To Islamize) was translated from the French into English by the British convert Muhammad Marmaduke Pickthall, under the title ‘The Reform of Muslim Society’¹¹ in the Hyderabad journal *Islamic Culture*.¹²

6 Mehmed Âkif translated his *İslamlaşmak* and *Les institutions politiques dans la société musulmane* into Ottoman Turkish and they were published in the famous review, *Sebilü'r-Reşad*.

7 Doğan Ertuğrul, “İsmail Kara: Türkiye’de Yalnız İslamcılık Düşüncesinin Tam bir Antolojisi Var,” *Nehir*, 8 (1994), 65.

8 Hayrettin Karaman, *Bir Varmış, Bir Yokmuş* (Istanbul: İz, 2008), I, 255.

9 Prens Said Halim Paşa, *Fikir Buhranımız* (Istanbul: Bedir, 1966); Said Halim Paşa, *Buhranımız* (Istanbul: Tercüman Gazetesi, 1973).

10 Muhammad Iqbal, *Javid Nama*, translated by A. J. Arberry (<http://www.allamaiqbal.com/works/poetry/persian/javidnama/translation/index.htm>).

11 Said Halim Pasha, “The Reform of Muslim Society,” *Islamic Culture*, I, 1 (1927), 111-135.

12 Syed Tanvir Wasti, “Said Halim Pasha—Philosopher Prince,” *Middle Eastern Studies*, XLIV, 1 (2008), 97.

Life and Political Career

To better understand Said Halim Pasha's ideas, it would be useful to briefly describe his intense life and political career.¹³ Mehmet Said Halim was born in Cairo on 19 February 1864. His father—Prince Halim Pasha—was the younger son of the great reformer and founder of the Egyptian royal family, Muhammad 'Ali Pasha. When in 1866 Sultan Abdülaziz excluded Said Halim's father from the line of succession to the Egyptian throne, Prince Halim attempted a coup d'état to overthrow the Khedive Ismail. The coup was aborted and Prince Halim was exiled to Istanbul with his entire family.¹⁴

In May 1888, Prince Halim started his career in the Hamidian administration; he rapidly advanced here, probably aided by his 'title' of prince. However, this career abruptly ended five years later, when his connections with opponents to the regime were unveiled and he was sent into exile.

However, while in Istanbul, Said Halim Pasha had merely been a sympathizer of the Young Turks and had actually played no significant role in the movement until that point. During his exile in Egypt, however, he became an activist and, as supervisor for the movement, he built relations with all the branches and main leaders of the movement. He constituted a source of conspicuous donations and prestige for the Young Turks, thanks also to his good relations with British authorities and his connections with Egyptian authorities.¹⁵

With the reinstatement of the Constitution in 1908, Said Halim returned to Istanbul and his position on the Council of State. Soon after, he began his political career, becoming the mayor of Yeniköy in the ranks of the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP). On 14 December 1908, Abdülhamid II nominated him as a member of the Senate. In 1912, he was elected as CUP secretary and in the following two congresses (1913 and 1916) as party leader. Also, in 1912 he became president of the Council of State and was sent by the government in an unsuccessful mission to Lausanne to mediate a peace treaty with Italy. During the negotiations, Said Halim Pasha proposed a division of the province that lay between the Ottoman Empire and Italy to the Italian delegation. The Italians rejected this offer and demanded the cession of the entire province. In the meantime, the new government of Ahmet

13 For more extensive information: M. Hanefi Bostan, *Bir İslamcı Düşünür: Said Halim Paşa* (İstanbul: İrfan, 1992), Ahmet Şeyhun, *Said Halim Paşa: Ottoman Statesman and Islamist Thinker* (İstanbul: Isis, 2003), and Küdret Bülbül, *Bir Devlet Adam ve Siyasal Düşünür Olarak Said Halim Paşa* (Ankara: Kadim, 2006).

14 Şeyhun, *Said Halim Paşa*, 45.

15 M. Şükrü Hanioğlu, *Preparation for a Revolution, the Young Turks, 1902-1908* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), pp. 139-140.

Muhtar Pasha that had been established in Istanbul judged it inopportune to pursue negotiations with Italy and did not renew the appointment of Said Halim Pasha.¹⁶

In the government lead by Mahmut Şevket Pasha (23 January-11 June 1913), Said Halim Pasha became foreign minister. After the murder of Mahmut Şevket Pasha at the hands of Liberal Entente conspirators on 11 June 1913, Said Halim Pasha became grand vizier, while remaining in the post of foreign minister until 1915. His government was the longest lasting of the Second Constitutional Period; it was formed on 17 June 1913 and lasted until 3 February 1917. However, it was an unfortunate and dramatic period for the Ottoman Empire; the government had to deal with the consequences of the Balkan Wars and with the terrible years of World War I.

Despite the ideas of Said Halim Pasha, his government was certainly more 'Turkist' and implemented certain secular reforms. The *Şeyhülislamlık* (*Meşihât-ı İslamiyye*) lost any competence in the administration of justice and all tribunals came under the control of the justice minister.¹⁷ On the other hand, the CUP seemed oriented toward an Islamist policy. After the Balkan Wars, no major Christian province was left and, as Ottoman subjects were predominantly Muslims, there was no need to perpetuate Ottomanism. Nevertheless, the emphasis on Muslim solidarity might have weakened emerging Arab nationalism.¹⁸ Even if he was not a member of the emerging Turkist group of the CUP, Said Halim Pasha was a socially respectable personality and represented the Islamist wing inside the CUP; moreover, he was an Arab. "It would be fair to conclude that it was designed *inter alia* to placate Arab opinion." Indeed, it was probably only because of Said Halim Pasha's personal intervention that the break between the Amir of Mecca and the Unionists did not take place earlier.¹⁹

However, the Pasha had to face a strong internal challenge. Since the early months of 1914, Enver had sat in Said Halim Pasha's government as the minister of war and Cemal Pasha was the minister of the navy. In the 1913 Party congress, Mehmed Talat Pasha became vice-president of the party. These three figures were behind the coup of January 1913 (the *Bab-ı Âli baskısı*) and represented the rising radical wing of the party. Their po-

16 Şeyhun, *Said Halim Pasha*, 78-9.

17 Tank Zafer Tunaya, *Türkiye'de Siyasal Partiler, Cilt III, İttihat ve Terakki, bir Çağın, bir Kuşağın, bir Partinin Tarihi* (Istanbul: İletişim, 2000), pp. 295-6.

18 Sina Akşin, *Jön Türkler ve İttihat ve Terakki* (Istanbul: İmge, 2001), 385-6.

19 Feroz Ahmad, *The Young Turks: the Committee of Union and Progress in Turkish Politics: 1908-1914* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), 137.

sitions seemed to be crucial in forcing the country into war, whereas Said Halim Pasha preferred neutrality.

The effects of Amir Hussein's revolt in the Hijaz on Said Halim's political career were fatal. When the Amir of Mecca, a descendent of the Prophet and a key symbolic figure in Islamic officialdom, joined forces with a non-Muslim enemy upon whom the Empire had declared *jihad*, Islamist ideology was dealt a severe blow and Said Halim Pasha was largely discredited in the cabinet. Also plans to support a revolt in Egypt—the Pasha's fatherland—against the British had failed. Consequently, Talat Pasha, who represented the Turco-Centrist wing within the CUP, replaced Said Halim in the last months of the war.

At the end of the hostilities, with all the leaders of the CUP remaining in Istanbul, Said Halim Pasha was arrested on 10 March 1919 and then put on trial by the occupying forces. On 22 May, just a week after the spread of disorder following the Greek invasion of İzmir, the pasha was transferred to a concentration camp in Malta by the British authorities. On 29 April 1921, Said Halim was freed and he travelled to Sicily. From there, however, he was prevented from going to Egypt (which, from December 1914, was formally under British protectorate) or to return to Istanbul, where the new government of Ahmet Tevfik Pasha denied him an entry visa.

Said Halim then opted to go to Rome. The Italian authorities intended to gain a greater political and economic influence in Anatolia by building good relations with leading figures of the dismantled CUP. Consequently, the Italian Foreign Ministry pressed British authorities to free Ottoman prisoners in Malta and helped them with visas and transportation. Furthermore, in January 1921, Italy sponsored a conference of 'Turkish nationalists' and in the following months many former Unionist leaders met in Rome. However, after the nationalist success in the battle of Sakarya at the end of August, the ill-informed Italian authorities concluded that the emerging authorities in Anatolia now only existed in Ankara.²⁰

Said Halim Pasha also soon realized that political events in Turkey would bring about unfavourable conditions for him. In his *L'Empire ottoman et la Guerre mondiale*,²¹ written when he was still a prisoner in Malta, Said

20 Fabio L. Grassi, "Diplomazia segreta Italo-Turca dopo la Prima Guerra mondiale: convergenze ed equivoci (1919-1920)," *Clio*, XXXIX, 1 (2003), and Fabio L. Grassi, "I profitti di un fallimento: politica ed affari segreti dell'Italia in Turchia tra 1920 e 1923," *Rassegna storica del Risorgimento*, XC, 1 (2003).

21 51-70.

Halim Pasha admired the independence struggle lead by Mustafa Kemal. In Rome, however, in his *Les institutions politiques dans la société musulmane*, he stated that he was hoping for rapid Egyptian independence and his feelings were focused on the “hard tests that the Young Egypt is facing.”²²

Said Halim Pasha did not survive to see the royal family ruling an independent Egypt. On 6 December 1921, he was assassinated close to Galeno Square in Rome by the Armenian nationalist, Arshavir Shirakian.²³

The decadence of the Muslim World

In 1917, Said Halim Pasha published *İnhitat-ı İslâm Hakkında bir Tecrübe-yi Kalemîyye* (An Essay on the Regression of Islam).²⁴ The Pasha attempted to answer the common question about the reasons for the decay of Islam, as a religion, state, and society. Since the second half of the nineteenth-century, this issue had obsessed Ottoman and Muslim intellectuals. He clearly stated that this decay was not due to Islam and even refused to answer the question of “why Islam prevented Muslim countries from developing?” He rather reformulated the question as “why do Muslims not know how to benefit from their religion?”²⁵

Indeed, he argued that other civilizations—such as the European and Japanese—developed and advanced despite their religious beliefs. If Islam itself was an obstacle to progress and development, Muslims would have remained in the same conditions prior to the acceptance of Islam. This had not happened. On the contrary, Islam represented the light of the impressive development of Muslim civilization. Yet this light had become enfeebled with time and eventually had stopped illuminating the path to knowledge and progress. Not all Muslim societies were in the same state of decay, however. The differences depended on the non-Muslim characteristics that were preserved after Islamization.

22 Saïd Halim Pacha, *Les institutions politiques dans la société musulmane* (Rome: Editrice Italia, 1921), 1.

23 *Corriere della Sera*, 8 December 1921 and 9 December 1921. Arshavir Shirakian later published his memoirs describing Dashnak’s hunt of Ottoman leaders in Rome and then in Berlin. Arshavir Shirakian, *Ktakn eñ nahataknerun* (Erewan: Adana, 1991) translated into English: *The Legacy: Memoirs of an Armenian Patriot* (Boston: Hairenik Press, 1976).

24 Under the name of Mehmet, *İnhitat-ı İslâm Hakkında bir Tecrübe-yi Kalemîyye* (Istanbul: Matba’-a-ı ‘Âmire, 1334).

25 Said Halim Paşa, *Buhranlarımız ve Son Eserleri*, 161-2.

Like all Islamists of his time, Said Halim Pasha had no doubt that Muslims misinterpreted their faith and this is why they had not been able to progress. Muslims were not capable of understanding the continuous evolution of time and the constant rise of new challenges, which needed new analyses, new explanations, and a new *ijtihad*. Muslim societies were influenced by their pre-Islamic cultures and were incapable of freeing themselves from this influence. This caused the loss of the prosperity and welfare that Islam might have provided.²⁶

Said Halim Pasha then accused a part of the clergy of bigotry and focused on the relationship between moral decay and material decay. This decay, however, “is not lethal. This decadence is neither moral nor social, but economical and consequently material and reparable.”²⁷ However, the pasha identified the beginning of the decadence with the emergence of a clergy in the Muslim world, and of a ‘scolastique.’ With time, the clergy lost curiosity in nature and natural sciences, and prevented Muslim peoples from carrying out scientific research. Eventually, this attitude created hostility among progressive elites toward the Muslim law and a desire for Westernization to find a path to progress.²⁸

Consequently, instead of rejuvenating the institutions that had made for Ottoman greatness, the new intellectual elite decided that imitation of the West would provide a swift short cut to progress. However, no one could understand that the whole experience of modernization was crucially different in Egypt and in the Empire better than Said Halim. His experience may have led him to define modernization in this way: “It was not one of empowerment, autonomy, and innovation, as it had been in Europe, but a process of deprivation, dependence, and patchy, imperfect imitation.”²⁹ Starting from these considerations, he spoke of the 1876 Ottoman Constitution in this way:

It is impossible to deny that this Chart constitutes a great error and that it does not reconcile the social, political, and spiritual conditions of the country. It even creates a threat for the Ottoman national essence [Milliyye-yi ‘Osmâniyye].³⁰

Indeed, Said Halim did not oppose modernization, but he warned against the process of imitation. In his first published work—*Meşrutiyet*—he even fur-

26 Ibid., 163.

27 Said Halim Pacha 1921, p. 22.

28 Said Halim Pacha 1921, pp. 22-4.

29 Karen Armstrong, *The Battle for God* (London: Harper, 2004), 123.

30 Said Halim Paşa, *Buhranlarımız ve Son Eserleri*, 59.

ther criticized the 1876 Ottoman Constitution, which was reinstated during the Second Constitutional era. He argued that the Constitution was a faulty imitation of European constitutional charters; this was not compatible with Ottoman society and for this reason would not help in the reform of the Ottoman state.

According to Said Halim Pasha, the wall raised between East and West was an obstacle to Muslim development. However, it would be a mistake to introduce reforms that were unfit for Ottoman society into the Empire without criticism. The mistake of the *Tanzimat* reforms was to believe that translating European law into Ottoman with minor changes was sufficient to attain prosperity in the country. Similarly, it was thought that the introduction of the French justice system was sufficient to reform Ottoman justice. Yet, the French justice system had been established on principles shaped by that society, which was certainly different from Ottoman society.³¹

Another reason for the decay, the pasha added, was the clash between the Muslim world and the Christian West. The consequent wars brought devastation and huge damage. At the same time, hostilities caused a detrimental repulsion against anything European among Muslims.³² This attitude was mainly due to European fanaticism.

Criticism of Europe

In his article *Ta'assup* (Fanaticism),³³ Said Halim Pasha switched the terms of the discussion to the relationship between Islam and bigotry. In fact, he accused Imperialist Europe of fanaticism: in the past, Europe had expressed its detestation of the East with the Crusades, the propaganda of the armies and the militant clergy—all of these had brought wars and devastation in the name of Christianity. Now, however, the propaganda against the East was in the name of modern 'civilization'.

At a time when the lands of Islam had developed and Europe was in darkness, the bright rays of Islamic science contributed to the rise of modern Europe. A sincere appraisal would have suggested that from this exchange Europe and the Islamic world could find unity and build a close relationship. Nevertheless, the Middle Ages were unfortunately the period when Europe fell under the sway of a fanatical priesthood.

31 Ibid., 57.

32 Said Halim Paşa, *Buhranlarımız ve Son Eserleri*, 164.

33 'Sırat-ı Müstakim', 4 (17/5/1328 [27/5/1910]).

Said Halim Pasha expressed a very important observation of Europe (in a relatively peaceful political context) that took place just before the Italian aggression against Libya and the Balkan Wars, but after the British occupation of Egypt (1882); he witnessed the effects of this occupation during his exile in Cairo between 1905 and 1908. According to the Pasha, the Near East was the geographical area that had suffered most from this Western assault. The cruelty, destruction and looting that characterized Western military incursions into Muslim lands resulted in the slow development of a hatred of the West on the part of Muslims; in addition there was a lack of trust for whatever came from the West. After all, the first contacts with the West in Muslim lands were with the Crusaders³⁴ and the warring priests. Their leaders lost no chance to spread falsehood and calumny about the Muslims when they returned home. The effects of this propaganda, conducted over many generations—Said Halim Pasha noticed—still appeared in contemporary Europe.

In the nineteenth-century, the concepts of ‘civilization’ and ‘progress’ constituted the new European religion. The old truths of Christianity had now been substituted by science and the “truths” of rationality; these formed a new faith for the Europeans. “Yes, the place of the old Christianity has been taken by a new religion.”³⁵ However, this new civilization, animated by a scientific racism, would justify the colonial occupations of the Islamic lands. Thus, Said Halim Pasha was also convinced that Europe had always bred hate against the Orient:

Since we are not calumniating anyone, we can state: the Crusaders' attempts have been fruitless. Indeed, the true reason behind Western hostility toward the East is the deep anger and hate for their failure to wipe out the Islamic personality [Şahsiyyet-i İslâmiyye], which has always opposed the spread of Christianity and the well-known European policy of civilization.³⁶

Moreover, European society was a selfish society that directed all its technological development toward brutality:

For four years we have been caught up in a World War in which we see the so-called most civilized nations use unimaginably destructive methods to wipe each other off the map, amid scenes of unprecedented violence and brutality. Western civilization, based on national consciousness and selfishness, appears

34 Among Islamist authors the Crusade became a very good symbol of European hostility toward Islam, which reappeared with Imperialism in nineteenth-century. Namık Kemal is the first to use the Crusade and also to identify Muslim staunch resistance with Salâh al-Dîn al-Ayyûbi.

35 Said Halim Paşa, *Buhranlarımız ve Son Eserleri*, 146.

36 *Ibid.*, 153.

to have developed sophisticated machines and technological devices for the satisfaction of the most primitive destructive feelings known to men.³⁷

Modern European technology also opened the way to disastrous wars and the creation of a profoundly unjust society.

However, because Muslims have the duty to portray a positive image of their religion and to strengthen the community, Europeans were not the only people to blame. Thus, Said Halim Pasha declared that Muslims had to unite not only against European colonialism, but also against despotic potentates who ruled over them oppressively and kept them in a state of ignorance and servility through coercion, even if one of these were the caliph himself.³⁸ Here, at this dramatic time, the Pasha not only legitimized the CUP revolution, but also propelled Muslims into a strong reaction. In the words of Mehmed Âkif:

Wake up O, Muslims! Wake up and unite; renounce your ethnic separatism. At least take a lesson from the fates of Morocco, Tunisia, and Algeria, all lost to Islam. They (the Western Powers) are also dividing Iran now! Otherwise your destiny will be the same: you will lose your independence and your country, the last of Islam will be overrun by the enemy.³⁹

Lastly, Said Halim Pasha considered the invasion of Muslim countries by Western powers not to be the cause, but rather the result of Muslim decline:

The decay of the Muslim world did not appear in all its reality and consequences until the Muslim peoples found themselves subjected by Christian peoples. The inferiority, evident in their state, attracts the invaders' attention.⁴⁰

Democracy and the Class Struggle

Said Halim Pasha defended the idea that European ideas of democracy and equality were already contemplated by Islam;⁴¹ this was something contemporary Islamists were affirming. Indeed, "from the early times we [Muslims] have lived according to the fundamental principles of democracy. Theoretically we are already a democratic nation."⁴² Although Europe knew

37 Wasti, "Said Halim Pasha-Philosopher Prince," 96.

38 Şeyhun, *Said Halim Paşa*, 39.

39 Mehmet Âkif Ersoy, *Safahat, Ediksyon Kritik*, edited by M. Ertuğrul Düzdağ (Ankara: Kültür Bakanlığı, 1990), 152. Translation by Şeyhun, *Said Halim Paşa*, 71.

40 Quoted in Şeyhun, *Said Halim Paşa*, 143.

41 İsmail Kara, *İslâmcıların Siyasi Görüşleri* (İstanbul: İz, 1994), pp. 108-9.

42 Said Halim Paşa, *Buhranlarımız ve Son Eserleri*, 88.

profound social injustices, the Muslim political system is based on the principle of egalitarianism among human beings. In fact, the Ottoman world never experienced a bourgeoisie or an aristocracy, whereas the West had known class struggle. Ottoman bureaucracy—to which our author belonged—might resemble the European bourgeoisie, but their commitment to duties, liberty, and independence made them free from detrimental seclusion.⁴³ Thus, “the duty assigned is not to introduce a new kind of democracy, but to apply it with greater tenacity and to develop the already existing democracy.”⁴⁴

The main difference between Islamic democracy and the European idea of democracy is that the latter emerged to provide citizens with badly needed egalitarianism, which a rigid class division had created. Consequently, “we do not share the opinion that following their [the Europeans’] example is right, because it is illogical for a society that does not know ‘aristocracy’ to conform itself to ‘democracy’.”⁴⁵ Because of the great differences that exist between the Ottoman world and Europe, the Ottomans needed to develop their own political institutions in harmony with their social principles. Moreover,

the fundamental principles of the Ottoman State form a unique entity.

The different nations, races, languages and the national peculiarities that established this state are so different that they can be explained to a European only with great difficulty. This happens because, according to European understanding, a political union can be reached only in the case of individuals bound by a community of language and religion. On the contrary, Ottoman political unity lacks community of races and languages, and generally lacks community of traditions and customs. Differently from Christian European states, Ottoman political unity, then, is not established on the nation but is established on the principle of Islamic unity and brotherhood.⁴⁶

Ottoman society not only did not experience a rigid class division, but also never recognized national identity. Said Halim Pasha made these considerations in his *Meşrutiyet*, published in 1911, even before the Balkan Wars. Overlooking the existence of non-Muslim communities in the Empire, he renounced the policy of Ottomanism (promoted also by the CUP until 1913) and laid down the basis for Islamist policies, which would be adopted by the Unionist movement when the loss of the Balkan provinces would definitely shift political attention to the core Muslim population.

In the very different historical conditions of 1918, when Arab and Turkish nationalism had become a political reality, Said Halim Pasha condemned the

43 Ibid., 62-63.

44 Ibid., 88.

45 Ibid., 66.

46 Ibid., 66-7. Emphasis is mine.

obstinacy of some Islamist intellectuals in neglecting the reality of different nations and in considering any form of nationalism as hostile to Islam. In fact, he noticed that, for many centuries, societies had come together thanks to a common language, common sentiments, a literature or a shared thought. However, if individuals considered national diversities as a reason for estrangement, the moral and spiritual common culture should prevail and bring unity.⁴⁷ The Muslim brotherhood was a superior moral common culture for Muslim societies and it imposed cooperation among different strata of the population, bringing unity between the higher stratum of society (*tabaka-yı havâs*) and the rest of the population (*avâm*). At the same time, Muslim brotherhood outshone detrimental national feelings.⁴⁸

The Muslim Political Regime

When he left his political responsibility, the Pasha concentrated himself on deepening his critique of European societies and on formulating a new idea of a Muslim state. In Rome he published *Les institutions politiques dans la société musulmane*, which represents probably his most interesting work.

According to Said Halim Pasha, the Islamic political system is established on the principle of the superiority of the Sharia and its correct enforcement. The Sharia is no more than the ensemble of social and moral law revealed to Prophet Muhammad and it is from here that human happiness is derived. It includes all natural social and moral laws; consequently, it is immutable over time and as independent from human will as the law of physics, that is, it is equal for all of humanity.

However, in contrast with the laws of physics, the Sharia cannot be understood via reasoning or observation, yet it can be vindicated by experience. In fact, men are not capable of analyzing or understanding objectively and critically all human relations without prejudice. Because of this, a revealed code is indispensable. A proof of this is given by the fact that European societies—despite the great level of development in science and technology—never knew equality.⁴⁹ Similarly, Europe has never been able to conceive a permanent social ideal. To its technological development and to the changes in material needs there always follows a new model of society. However, a model that is not constant does not consider the human being and moral values, which are permanent and independent from men's will.

47 Ibid., 207.

48 Ibid., p. 175.

49 Saïd Halim Pacha, *Les institutions politiques dans la société musulmane*, 7-11.

The European nations have never learnt the true permanent moral and social principles, also called the divine order of human life that ensures the human society a perfect stability, which means a perfect equilibrium. Without equilibrium social peace is faulty and ephemeral.

Now, the instability of a social regime is the clear result of the fact that it is impossible to satisfy a portion of society without displeasing another one, namely to back a portion of society to the detriment of another.⁵⁰

Under these conditions, the shape of the political regime is not important, because it will repeat the old conflicts inside society, namely the antagonisms among social classes that lead to violence that causes damage to the entire society. This mistake will be repeated until permanent moral values are not respected and cannot be applied impartially and liberties and equality cannot be restored into society.⁵¹

Also, Said Halim Pasha recognized that the sovereignty of the Sharia, a revealed and immutable law, is in contrast with the principle of national sovereignty and democracy. Indeed, human sovereignty implies the opportunity of the representatives of the people to modify laws or even regimes. The Sharia, though, gives people only the possibility of interpretation, which makes Islamic law flexible, but unchallengeable.

Nevertheless,

what people call the national will is really nothing but the will of the majority of the nation—it may conceivably be that of half the nation plus one vote, that is to say, the will of a very weak majority in opposition to a very strong minority, a minority almost equal to the majority.⁵²

National sovereignty, then, is given the chance of imposing its tyranny on the majority; this can openly be in conflict with common sense. If a widespread fallacious notion cannot interfere with the law of physics, it should not be able to interfere with the permanent moral and social norms.⁵³ Thus, legislation is effectively the function of the party in power and, as a consequence, is not always geared to the greatest interest of the country as a whole, but is tainted with political favours or the attempt to quash opposing parties. Here, Said Halim Pasha seems to ignore Madison and Tocqueville and his discussion on the “tyranny of the majority”. Indeed, the Pasha’s political experience in the CUP and the political context in which he writes (a few months after the publication of *Les institutions politiques* Mussolini marched

50 Ibid., 30.

51 Ibid., 30-2.

52 Said Halim Pasha, “The Reform of Muslim Society,” 116.

53 Said Halim Pasha, *Les institutions politiques dans la société musulmane*, 16.

toward Rome) probably influenced him toward a corporatist conception of society rather than a system built on individualism.

Even if the Constitutional revolution of 1908 initially led to political and economic liberalism, the request by national and religious minorities for autonomy, as well as the control of commerce by non-Muslim minorities, rapidly imposed a different understanding of economy and politics. It was during the years of the Great War and of Said Halim Pasha's government that the Unionist stressed the idea of a 'National Economy' (*Milli İktisat*) and corporatism.⁵⁴ Moreover, the Pasha's condemnations of European individualism and his emphasis on the community were not very far from those of Ziya Gökalp, the leading intellectual of the CUP and the "philosopher, the man of ideas of the Atatürk Revolution."⁵⁵ The great difference between the two authors is that Gökalp later based national solidarity and unity on pre-Islamic Turkish ethics,⁵⁶ whereas Said Halim Pasha firmly linked them to Islamic social values.

The Pasha also strongly criticized the use of representation in democracies. He argued that the task of national representation is to 'democratize' society, namely to submit the minority to the will of the majority which is pursuing its own advantages rather than a wise and honest administration of the country. In this context, the laws were enacted with the primary aim of satisfying private interests as well as party and class interests without sufficient regard for public welfare.⁵⁷

Only the Islamic state system, based on the Sharia, then, can really answer human necessities. The Sharia is the standard of ethical and social truth, and consequently the only guarantee of ethical and social justice. Indeed,

Islam's social realization is to establish a social state based on equality and liberty according to their most natural spirit and character: a social state where there is no class struggles, no rivalries among casts, where there is no need of liberty or claims for equality.⁵⁸

Every Muslim believer has the duty to control how the government fulfils its Islamic obligations. This duty can be transmitted to a Muslim parliament (*Parlement Musulman*), which will scrutinize the activity of the executive,

54 On this subject see: Zafer Toprak, *Türkiye'de "Milli İktisat" (1908-1918)* (Ankara: Yurt, 1982), particularly 17-35.

55 As Devereux writes in his introduction to Ziya Gökalp, *The Principles of Turkism* (Leiden: EJ. Brill, 1968), ix.

56 Particularly in his *Türkçülüğün Esasları* published in 1923.

57 Said Halim Pasha, "The Reform of Muslim Society," 126.

58 Said Halim Pasha, *Les institutions politiques dans la société musulmane*, 17.

but cannot have legislative power. In the parliament, solidarity and harmony will dominate because Islam does not recognize class struggle or disputes among nationalities.⁵⁹ Consequently, there is no reason for the existence of political parties, which emerged in Europe due to the different interests of social classes. The political action, though, must be addressed to the common interest of serving the *vatan* (fatherland) in perfect harmony.⁶⁰ Here, there is a further demonstration of Said Halim Pasha's underestimation of intermediate organizations and of liberal democracy.

The legislative power cannot be held by a simple assembly of representatives. As the practice of medicine can only be carried out by doctors, the legislative power can only be held by qualified people, knowledgeable of the Sharia, who possess high moral qualities. The nation will chose a legislative assembly (*Assemblée législative*) among the Muslim scholars, and this will have the duty to establish the supremacy of the Sharia.⁶¹

Said Halim Pasha omits the figure of the caliph, whom he considered to be marginal, as did Seyid Bey did in his speech for the abolition of Caliphate in the Turkish Grand National Assembly, in 1924.⁶² Said Halim put an elected institution (*le Chef d'Etat*) at the head of the executive. It was to be responsible for its actions in front of the Sharia and the nation.⁶³ The only aim was to satisfy the needs of the nation.⁶⁴

Conclusions

Said Halim Pasha is an interesting Ottoman author and one of the best representatives of the Islamist movement that emerged in the Second Constitutional Era. His family was probably of Albanian descent⁶⁵ and he was educated both in Cairo and Istanbul. He was not familiar with national identity, but his horizons were wide. As we have seen, his most important work was *Les institutions politiques* written in French (as was all his intellectual production) and his dedication was to the Egyptian nationalist movement of Sa'ad Zaglül, rather than to the more successful (but hostile) nationalist

59 Ibid., 38-40.

60 Said Halim Paşa, *Buhranlarımız ve Son Eserleri*, 81-2 and 172.

61 Said Halim Pacha, *Les institutions politiques dans la société musulmane*, 41-2.

62 Michelangelo Guida, "Seyyid Bey and the Abolition of the Caliphate," *Middle Eastern Studies*, XLIV, 2 (2008).

63 Said Halim Pacha, *Les institutions politiques dans la société musulmane*, 43-4.

64 Ibid., 45.

65 The Albanian origin of Said Halim Pasha's grandfather is contested by Muhammet Hanefi Kutluoğlu, "Kavalalı Mehmed Ali Pasha," *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslâm Ansiklopedisi (DİA)*, 2002, XXV, 62.

movement in Anatolia. However, for many years he loyally fought to save the Ottoman Empire from the hands of European Imperialism.

Even if his contemporaries did not appreciate his thought, successive generations of Islamists in Republican Turkey have been and will be strongly influenced by Said Halim Pasha. However, as many of the Islamist intellectuals that followed, in his interpretation of democracy there are two basic unresolved issues: the role of the individual and the relation between national sovereignty and the Sharia. With Said Halim Pasha, society and the state always dominate over the individual. In such a case, though, it is difficult to preserve liberties and private initiative. Finally, the people's sovereignty is restricted by the immutable rules of the Sharia and even its interpretation is left to a restricted circle of scholars. After 1979, a similar solution was adopted by the Iranian *Shura-e Nigahban*, which supervised the activity of Parliament and the political and social system.

Özet

Bu makale Osmanlı devlet adamlarından Said Halim Pařa'nın hayatını kısaca inceledikten sonra siyasi düşünceleri, Batı eleřtirileri ve alternatif bir İslâmî sistem önerisi üzerine yoğunlaşmaktadır. Said Halim Pařa Batı siyasi düşüncesinin derin etkilerini taşımasına rağmen siyasi reformlarda yerli kaynaklardan yararlanmaya çalışmıştır. Fakat onun önerileri, İslamcı hareketin güç kaybetmeye başladığı dönemde dile getirildiğinden yeterince dikkate alınmamış ve bu önerilerin önemi Türkiye'de yıllar sonra kavranmıştır. Said Halim Pařa'nın düşünceleri çok değerli olmakla birlikte çağdaş demokrasi ve insan hakları anlayışıyla bir kısım uyumsuzluklar içermektedir. Makalede bu uyumsuzluklar tahlil edilmektedir.