



Mustafa Yıldız. *Bir İslamcıya Göre Kapitalizm ve Sosyalizm: Eşref Efendizâde Şevketî'nin "Sa'y ve Sermâye Mücâdelâtının Dînen Sûret-i Halli" Risalesi* (Capitalism and Socialism for an Islamist: Eşref Efendizâde Şevketî's Treatise on "Resolution for the Conflict between Labor and Capital")

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Notion of Islamic economics, although a twentieth century phenomenon, has its origins in the time of our Beloved Prophet ﷺ and His Rightly Guided Caliphs as well as in the writings of Muslim scholars. Throughout the history of Muslim Economic Thinking (MET), Muslims experienced various political, economic and social threats and opportunities that formed the basis for the transformation of MET on one hand, as these threats and opportunities triggered the formation of a historical consistency in MET on the other. Regardless of time, space, context, and actors, each development revealed the different aspects of consistent stance against the transformations. Thus, consistency, transformations and disintegration, in that sense, are vital to understand to what extent the contemporary Islamic economics literature constitutes consistency and integrity — *in terms of Shari'ah legitimacy and methodology* — with its roots formed by the Prophet ﷺ and advanced by His Rightly Guided Caliphs, as systemized and elaborated throughout the history.

As a continuation of the historical adventure of MET, late Ottoman period — mainly constitutes the second half of the 19th century and the early 20th century —

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was one of the breaking points for transformation and disintegration of the MET throughout its history. This period witnessed some unprecedented socio-economic changes in the world history, which were triggered by the events such as industrial revolution, French revolution, so-called enlightenment movement, colonization, increasing number of pitched battles, emergence of various ideologies through which the masses conflicted with each other. Nevertheless, Mehmed Eşref Efen-dizâde Şevketî's treatise on the conflict between labor and capital (*Sa'y ve Sermâye Mücâdelâtının Dînen Sûret-i Halli Risalesi*) was one of the important signs of such consistent stance during the late Ottoman period.

In the early 20th century, had the Ottoman Empire disengaged from its classical economic paradigm which was an extension of Islamic economic tradition, there had been a severe conflict between capital and labor, which would have lead a class struggle between capitalists and their laborers in Ottoman lands. There emerged some demands and labor movements, however they were not as significant as in the west. It might be said that Islamic values and culture had prevented the emergence of such conflict to a significant extent. Thus, in the Ottoman society, we cannot trace back the existence of capitalist or socialist tendencies to the extent that class struggle might have emerged as a result of them.

As a representative of *'ulema* at his time, who improved himself and gained insight into different branches of Islamic knowledge and various western disciplines, Şevketî set an example in terms of using these intellectual formations by being loyal to Islamic values and principles. He was a member of *Darü'l-Hikmeti'l-İslâmiyye*, which was an Islamic academy that operated under the *Şeyhülislâmlık* during 1918-1922, a *müderriş* and *dersiâm* in *Süleymaniye Medresesi* and *Bayezid Medresesi* on *'ilm-i nefis* and *ahlâk*, and also one of the founders of *Cemiyetü'l-Müderrişîn*. As a response to two letters from the Anglican Church to *Darü'l-Hikmeti'l-İslâmiyye* written in 1918 and 1921, in which the church requested a brief introduction about Islam and the Islamic stance against the prevention of class conflicts which had threatened the social order in the Europe from competent *'ulemâ*, Şevketî wrote a treatise on the solution for the conflict between labor and capital (Şevketî, p. 6).

Ever-mounting magnitude of this conflict, which had also been driven by Bolshevik revolution in Russia, rising socialistic tendencies among the masses and negligent attitude of capitalists, was increasingly felt in Europe to the extent that the Anglican Church requested to learn the Islamic stance against the issue. The interest of the church about the Islamic position against the conflict and their effort to learn from a government agency of the Ottoman Empire are remarkable points

in terms of their perceived mentality as well. Şevketî addressed the first request in his reply, by touching upon a brief description and explanation regarding Islam, classification of *ahkâm*, pillars of *akâid* and *ahkâm-ı ameliyye* and *ahkâm-ı vicdaniyye* by referring to some Verses of the Holy Qur'an and *Sunnah* of Rasulullah ﷺ. For the second request, he wrote his reply under five chapters that are *İki nev'-i tarz-ı hayât ve netâici* (Two kinds of lifestyle and their consequences), *Garbdaki mes'elenin esbâb-ı hudûsu* (Reasons that arose the issue in the west), *Mes'elenin hall-i ihtimâlâtı* (Possibilities for solving the issue), *Mes'elenin yegâne çâre-i halli* (Sole remedy for the issue) and *Âkâbet-i hâl* (State of the denouement). Under the first chapter, *İki nev'-i tarz-ı hayât ve netâici*, Şevketî briefly explains the two kinds of worldviews, one of which believes and knows the reality of Hereafter and the other assumes that the life is about the worldly life as it does not accept the Hereafter, and the economic consequences of these worldviews, by referencing to the lives of Prophets and features of Islamic civilization. In the second chapter, *Garbdaki mes'elenin esbâb-ı hudûsu*, he explains the three reasons behind the conflict between labor and capital in the west, one of which points out the denial of *Tawhid* and belief in trinity, as Christian scholars distorted and garbled Christianity as a result of which masses were alienated from the religion and sought other ways for salvation. The second reason is the inequality in resource allocation and distribution, as well as in inheritance, as it formed the basis for the formation of social classes and the conflict between them. Lastly, the third one is the increasing international competition between states, as it triggered the formation of regular armies on a vast scale, subsequently the need for financing these military powers emerged and it consequently increased the tax burden on the public.

In the third chapter, *Mes'elenin hall-i ihtimâlâtı*, Şevketî evaluates some possibilities regarding the solution for the conflict. Firstly, he mentions the possibility that those who were satisfied with the status-quo would tend to use legal power, instead of taking the complaints of poor classes into account. Secondly, he points out that, the main causes of the conflict were individual and external differences which formed the classes. In this regard, he emphasizes the point that existence and continuation of the individual and social differences is a natural consequences of the Divine Wisdom, as Allah Ta'ala states "... It is We who have apportioned among them their livelihood in the life of this world and have raised some of them above others in degrees [of rank] that they may make use of one another for service. But the mercy of your Lord is better than whatever they accumulate" (Qur'an, 43:32). In addition, he accentuates that efforts for abolishing these differences are vain and against the Divine Wisdom, as the Prophet ﷺ states that

“...Verily your blood, your property and your honor are as sacred and inviolable as the sanctity of this day of yours...”(Sahih al-Bukhari 3:9; Sahih Muslim 28:43) in the Last Sermon. In that regard, as neither preserving the status-quo, nor abolishing the differences completely would solve the problem, Şevketî suggested that the solution for the conflict is *islah* in the sense of improving, bettering and restoring the situation.

In the fourth chapter, *Mes'elenin yegâne çâre-i halli*, he remarks the importance of instinctive desire to him or for human beings by explaining the Verse of Surah Ali 'Imran, (Qur'an 3:14). In that sense, while the rich live in a self-indulgent manner, the poor cannot be supposed to control their desires for worldly possessions. However, if the ruling class and scholars live in a pious and contented way, the poor can prefer the life of Hereafter and feel a contentment by controlling their desires. Such contentment can be merely attained through believing in the right religion, which gives to hearts a sense of fulfilment, and following the way of Prophets. Thus, the sole remedy for the conflict is to believe in Islam and accept the lifestyle that Islam conveys. In addition, Şevketî views the conflict as a result of the animosity and hatred put among the Christians because of forgetting their covenant with their Lord, as Allah Ta'ala in Surah Al-Maidah states that “...but they forgot a portion of that of which they were reminded” (Qur'an 5:14)¹. Hence, as the animosity and hatred among them are the results of denying the Prophethood of Muhammad ﷺ, believing in His ﷺ Prophethood will remove the animosity and hatred among them, thus solve the conflict. He explains this truth in a detailed way, and makes its connection with the conflict between labor and capital.

For the last chapter of the treatise, *Âkıbet-i hâl*, Şevketî indicates that while Islam is a remedy to many problems of the west, he thinks that the west will not be likely to accept Islam because leaving their attractive lifestyle and preferring a simple and plain one is hard for the westerners. He adds that where and when an intellectual reform starts to take place within the minds, this reform might come to fruition by eliminating the barriers. In that regard, he emphasizes the importance of capitalists' arrogant attitude against the poor by referencing the parable of *Qarun* in Surah al-Qasas in the Holy Qur'an (28: 76-83). For the denouement of the conflict, he predicts that the conflict will not come to an end, as Allah Ta'ala

1 “And from those who say, ‘We are Christians’ We took their covenant; but they forgot a portion of that of which they were reminded. So We caused among them animosity and hatred until the Day of Resurrection. And Allah is going to inform them about what they used to do” (al-Maidah 5:14)

states that the animosity and hatred put among them will last until the Day of Judgement in Surah al-Maidah (Qur'an 5:14). In conclusion, Şevketî admits that resolving this conflict is a quite difficult issue for all the easterners and westerners. He accentuates that both of them should think over the conflict more, and while westerners would understand to what extent they strayed from the way of the Prophets, Muslim easterners would realize the desperate consequences of devoting themselves to the worldly life in order to protect their political existence along with the developed states. He finishes the treatise by considering that solely devoting to worldly life leads to desperate consequences whereas leaving it harms both the world and the Hereafter, hence it requires the reconciliation between these two lifestyles, as he asks a question towards the end; "How can it be possible?" (Şevketî, p.32). Answering this question is quite hard according to Şevketî, as this question has remained unanswered since it emerged. He concluded his treatise by pointing out the challenge to answer this question and content himself with the explanations that he made throughout the book. Notwithstanding he could not answer the last question and propose a solution, his treatise is an important instance which was written in the early 20th century, addressing the conflict which had been stemming from the modern phenomena from the consistent perspective in terms of the heritage of MET.

Furthermore, the impressive style and expression are other outstanding points of this book. It reflects the richness and depth of the late Ottoman Turkish in terms of both vocabulary and manner of discourse. It reflects the level of politeness — in terms of linguistics — in the late Ottoman period as well. These linguistic features of the book make it more impressive and attention taking for the audience who are familiar with Ottoman Turkish.

Mustafa Yıldız published the Şevketî's treatise by latinizing its original manuscript without any interference for the contemporary Turkish audience and added a brief summary regarding the content of the book². However, it should be noted that the name of this edition does not seem to be coherent with the content of the treatise, as Şevketî did not directly speak of capitalism and socialism as economic systems. Rather he mentioned the class struggles among the poor and the rich that emerged in the west, the underlying reasons behind them, and evaluated the conflict and its reasons in the context of Islamic texts and evidences. Hence, it seems like it would be better to prefer the original name of the treatise.

2 We are also indebted to Mustafa Yıldız for this brief summary, as we benefited from it in this review.

Moreover there were previous editions which were published before this book, as the first edition of the treatise was published in 1924 by *Matbuat-ı Osmaniyye* in Ottoman Turkish, then its summarized edition was published by Hedef Yayınları under the name of *İslam'da Emek ve Sermaye* (Labor and Capital in Islam) in 1964 (Yıldız, p.10). Although there are some typos regarding the latinized text, as well as problems related to general layout and punctuation marks, the book constitutes an important milestone for the consistency of MET in the late Ottoman period, as it must be read for the researchers in history of Islamic economic thought and Islamic economics. For those who want to read it from the original manuscript, it is available in some online databases, such as ISAM's Treatise Database in Ottoman Language.

Briefly, Eşref Efendizâde Şevketî's treatise constitutes a milestone for the MET in the late Ottoman period, through which the consistency of it can be understood in a more accurate way and some of important problems of contemporary Islamic economics literature can be addressed too, as it might provide crucial insights to establish a healthy relationship with the roots and heritage of MET. Instead of evaluating it just as a historical document, it might be considered as a part of the two centuries-long struggle of Muslims for developing through being loyal to Islamic values as well. Notwithstanding, he did not propose an exact solution for that, Şevketî's treatise should maintain its importance in the sense of historical consistency of MET.

References

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