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The Nurcu Movement and Tafsir Risale-i Nur: Formation of Muslim Identity in the Midst of Modernization

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Abstract: This article discusses the Nurcu movement and Risale-i Nur amidst the process of modernization during Republican Turkey. The atheistic science adopted during the modernization absorbed Said Nursi's concern. In attacking the philosophy of materialism and atheism, he resorted to an attempt to interpret the Qur'an, namely Risale-i Nur. Through the Risale-i Nur, a group of Said Nursi's followers came together into a social movement, which is known as the Nurcu movement. This article aims to reveal how Said Nursi faced modernity and posited the Nurcu movement in the midst of modernity. This research used a content analysis approach to the works written by Said Nursi, especially Risale-i Nur, as the main data, and supplementary data were gathered from studies conducted by scholars concerning Said Nursi, Risale-i Nur, and the Nurcu movement. In addition, reading on the intellectual context surrounding the emergence of Risale-i nur becomes a tool to comprehend the content of Risale-i Nur and the thoughts of the author. This research found that with the presence of Risale-i Nur, the followers of Said Nursi's teachings make Risale-i Nur a marker of group identity bringing with them tasks to seize science and modernity. Said Nursi's work is a modernist kind of interpretation of the Quran. Thus, in the midst of modernization and secularization in Turkey, Risale-i Nur offers Muslims an identity.
Keywords: Said Nursi; modernist tafsir; Islam and modernity; Islamic social movements; philosophy of materialism

Abstrak: *Artikel ini mengupas posisi gerakan Nurcu dan tafsir Risale-i Nur di tengah proses modernisasi yang bernuansa ateistik di masa akhir Kesultanan Ottoman dan masa Turki Republik. Kenyataan ini menggusarkan Said Nursi, seorang pemikir Muslim dari Turki. Ia melakukan serangan terhadap filsafat materialisme dan ateisme melalui tafsir al-Qur'an, yaitu Risale-i Nur. Berkat kehadiran tafsir Risale-i Nur ini, sekelompok pengikut Said Nursi bergabung dalam satu wadah yang dikenal dengan gerakan Nurcu. Artikel ini bertujuan untuk mengungkap cara Said Nursi menghadapi modernitas, dan posisi gerakan Nurcu di tengah arus modernitas tersebut. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan content analysis terhadap karya yang ditulis oleh Said Nursi, terutama tafsir Risale-i Nur, sebagai data utama, dan studi yang dilakukan oleh ilmuwan tentang Said Nursi dan tafsir Risale-i Nur serta gerakan Nurcu sebagai data tambahan. Selain itu, pembacaan terhadap konteks intelektual yang melingkupi kemunculan tafsir Risale-i nur menjadi alat bantu untuk membaca isi tafsir dan pemikiran Si Penulis tafsir tersebut. Termuan artikel ini mengungkapkan bahwa berkat tafsir Risale-i Nur, para pengikut ajaran Said Nursi yang tergabung dalam gerakan Nurcu, menjadikan tafsir Risale-i Nur ini sebagai penanda identitas kelompok dengan tugas merebut sains dan modernitas. Hal ini membuktikan bahwa karya Said Nursi ini adalah tafsir modernis. Dengan demikian, di tengah arus modernisasi dan sekularisasi di Turki, Risale-i Nur menawarkan identitas kemusliman bagi masyarakat Turki.*
Kata Kunci: *Said Nursi; tafsir modernis; Islam dan modernitas; gerakan sosial Islam; filsafat materialisme*

INTRODUCTION

The nineteenth-century encounter of modernity and Islam, which occurred with Western colonialism over the Islamic world, spawned a variety of responses, particularly in addressing the relationship between science and Islam. A number of Muslim thinkers emerged in the midst of this situation, including Muhammad Abduh, Sayyid Ahmad Khan, Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, and Said Nursi. Said Nursi's (1873-1960) ideas on the Tafsir *Risale-i Nur* could be classified as "modern." Although both Said Nursi and Muhammad Abduh responded to the West (Hamid, 2014), Nursi was different from Abduh in that Abduh did not attempt to reconcile Islam and modernity, particularly science and Islam. Furthermore, although these two thinkers shared numerous similarities, it appeared that their interpretations differ. One of them, Abduh, employed a text-based method and followed the Salaf pattern (Bustaman and Aisyah, 2020), whereas Nursi relied on theology. In addition, while Abduh was critical of the classical interpretation style, Nursi might be considered an example of the Ottoman interpretative school and a follower of the interpretation style of al-Baydawi, Fakhruddin al-Razi, and al-Zamakhsari (Coruh, 2017).

Said Nursi is a Turkish Muslim philosopher, thinker, and writer best known for his magnum opus, *Risale-i Nur* (Vahide, 2019). He was also regarded as the founder of the Nurcu movement in Turkey (Markham and Pirim, 2016). So far, a lot of studies regarding Said Nursi have not been sufficient to provide an in-depth explanation, particularly for the works of the *Risale-i Nur*. It is similar to the narrative of a blind man attempting to explain the figure of an elephant, and most scientists were satisfied when they described certain aspects of the *Risale-i Nur*. Serif Mardin was the first scientist to introduce Said Nursi's views and thoughts to Western academic circles. Then, scientific interest in the Nurcu movement has grown after he wrote a book about Said Nursi (Mardin, 1989). Serif Mardin mentioned in his works that Nursi's concepts must be analyzed as a whole since it becomes interesting when studied as an organic unit to develop a coherent view (Mardin, 2003). Nonetheless, Mardin's writings on Nursi do not fully describe Said Nursi's immense accomplishment as a social movement serving as a religious identity.

Various studies on Nursi, one of which is the work of Sukran Vahide (Vahide, 2005), failed to recognize Nursi's understanding of the complexity of 19th-century scientific developments such as advances in biology, thermodynamics, and the theory of heat, so it reads that Nursi tended to criticize atheism from a mechanistic scientific point of view. As a result, many of Nursi's works rectify the mechanical mindset that he previously criticized. Nursi's views in *Risale-i Nur* are a rearrangement of the structures of Islamic culture in the modern world, particularly ideas regarding science and modernization (Aydin, 2019). While proponents of materialist philosophy employed an intricate clockwork mechanism to demonstrate the emptiness of the concept of God intervening in nature, Nursi utilized it to prove the existence of God who actively regulates nature with its laws.

At the fall of the Ottoman Empire, modernization eroded Muslim identity. The implementation of this modernization coincided with the introduction of the concept of materialism that accompanied science. The incorporation of this atheistic materialist philosophy made Said Nursi aware of the need to struggle for and preserve the Turkish people's Muslim identity. *Risale-i Nur* arose as a guideline for the Turkish Muslim community in order to protect their Muslim identity. Nursi's life experience of persecution, inner conflict, and discontent with his political activity prompted him to step

aside from politics. Nonetheless, despite his lack of involvement in politics throughout the Turkish Republic, characterizing Nursi as an apolitical thinker was deemed inappropriate (Kuru and Kuru, 2008). According to the author, Nursi was engaging in cultural politics through the Nurcu movement and the *Risale-i Nur*. The question is, how did Nursi navigate cultural politics? Furthermore, where did the Nurcu movement stand in the midst of this process? The answers to these questions are discussed in the following section. Unlike previous researchers, the author considers that *Risale-i Nur* gives space for Turkish society's Muslim identity to develop in the midst of modernization.

METHOD

The researcher used a qualitative method to discuss the Nurcu movement and the work of *Risale-i Nur*. The use of this method is aimed to obtain a more complete description of the Nurcu movement and the *Risale-i Nur* since it allows researcher to understand occurrences through the emic view or viewpoints of Nurcu movement followers. This research employed a number of main references written by Said Nursi, particularly *Risale-i Nur* as the primary data. Additional data were obtained from a variety of scientific perspectives and studies on Said Nursi, *Risale-i Nur*, and the Nurcu movement. Aside from that, to supplement the data, the researcher also acquired information about the Nurcu movement, *Risale-i Nur*, and the figure of Said Nursi from Nurcu followers dispersed throughout Indonesia. Nurcu followers or adherents can be found in Jakarta, Tangerang, Banten, Bandung, Semarang, and other cities in Indonesia. During the fieldwork, the researcher observed their activities and movements and conducted interviews with a number of Nurcu movement followers.

To obtain a complete picture of *Risale-i Nur*, the researcher has to comprehend the context of thought that led to the birth of this interpretation. According to Christian Troll, one's thinking is the result of an interaction between the thinker and the intellectual context that surrounds him (Troll, 1978). Meanwhile, to gain a comprehensive understanding of the contents of the *Risale-i Nur*, the researcher employed discourse analysis theory, as discourse is a process that shapes objects so that they can convey information (Howarth and Stavrakakis, 2000). That is, discourse shapes topics, generates objects of knowledge, and determines how a topic should be addressed. The researcher also considers that discourse analysis is a method of analyzing the social construction of a phenomenon that includes thinking and areas of knowledge (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985). This method assists the researcher in comprehending the meanings, interpretations, and practices found in the work of the *Risale-i Nur* and the Nurcu movement.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Said Nursi and the Writing of Risale-i Nur

Said Nursi was born in the Turkish city of Bitlis in 1873 to a family of Islamic scholars. His childhood was spent studying and learning at several madrasas in his hometown. Nursi appeared as an active participant in the capital's political revolution at an early age (Mohammad, 2018). He supported the constitution and nationalism, which was based on the spirit of social solidarity (Abdul Rahim and Akhmetova, 2019). A number of his writings during that time emphasized his optimism in reconciliation between Islam and Western science, despite the wave of atheism and materialism that infiltrated the teaching of science. He had not given up hope that universities could educate religion and secular science in tandem, forming a connection between science and Islam.

In 1916, Nursi enlisted as a volunteer in the fight against Russia during the First World War and later became a prisoner of war. He was detained in Siberia. According to his notes, he went through a deep psychological upheaval while in prison and realized that he was getting old. He reflected that after spending half of his life in political activities, he knew it had left him spiritually empty. After escaping from the Russian prison, Nursi returned to Istanbul through Europe. Although he was appointed as an official in Daru'l-Hikmetu'l-Islami, an institution intended to aid the government in religious matters, he got into profound despair during that time (Nursi, 2002, 206-207). He immediately understood that the Western science he had studied was incapable of assisting him in overcoming his grief. In reality, he considered atheistic science as a contributing factor to the problem (Nursi, 2002, 207).

In the midst of this inner struggle, he immersed himself in reading *Futuh al-Ghayb* by Sheikh Abdul Qadir al-Jilani. From his contemplation, he decided to leave politics and devoted his entire time to studying the Quran. Although he supported Mustafa Kemal's resistance movement in Anatolia and visited Ankara in 1923, he became disillusioned with members of parliament who trivialized religion. Nursi refused to join parliament. He left Ankara and opted to live in Van. In this place, he began to focus on investigating the Quran.

When Nursi spent time studying the Quran, he was forced to return to politics, albeit in a different form, several years after the Republic of Turkey government was established in Ankara. In 1925, Nursi was compelled to flee Van and resided in Barla, Isparta, Eastern Turkey, along with a number of other Kurdish officials accused of involvement in Sheikh Said's rebellion. This Kurdish rebellion movement was led by the Naqshabandi leader, Syekh Said from Palu who had no ties to Said Nursi. In Nursi's case, the allegations against him were unfounded. However, the brutal behavior of the Ankara government in forcing him to flee to Isparta convinced him that 'European materialism', which he initially identified as the main problem threatening Islam, had by then firmly established itself in Ankara, and began to attack the Islamic views of ordinary people. He began writing the *Risale-i Nur* because he no longer believed in the benefits of political involvement and considered that the problem that befell Turkish society was on the cultural side, arising from secularization, which threatened the existence of Islam in Turkey. He completed most of this work in Isparta between 1925 and 1934.

Serif Mardin provided a compelling sociological explanation for the Nurcu movement's effectiveness in attracting numerous members and supporters. Due to the limited financial resources he had while living in Isparta, Nursi developed a mass movement by emphasizing the text *Risale-i Nur* as the center and magnet in the world of Sufism, substituting the concept of 'teacher-student' in the tariqat tradition (Mardin 1989). Although the success of Nursi's teachings could not be explained just by reference to the social realities of the early Turkish Republic, the Nurcu movement grew, remained relevant, and was successful even as Turkish society changed. The success of the Nurcu movement can be explained in a variety of ways, one of which is the banning of the tariqat movement in Turkey following Sheikh Said al-Kurdi's uprising, which resulted in the existence of *Risale-i Nur* becoming central in the Turkish Muslim community (Faiz, 2017).

In 1935, Nursi was expelled and persecuted. The Turkish Republic's authorities accused him of being involved in political opposition to the Republic of Turkey. Previously, a number of Sufi leaders revolted against the government of the Republic of

Turkey, until on November 30, 1925, the government of the Republic of Turkey forbade the congregation from operating in Turkey. Nursi was not a figure involved in practical politics as the Turkish rulers had assumed. The persecution, suffering, imprisonment, and expulsion he experienced led him to the conclusion that strong faith would make a person strong and achieve soul peace (Keskin, 2019).

From 1923 through 1950, Nursi suggested Nurcu movement supporters to avoid politics. Nursi's actions demonstrated that he was wise enough to recognize realities on the ground at a time when the single political party policy offered little possibility of success. Although Nursi and the Nurcu movement removed themselves from practical politics, Said Nursi was not anti-politics. He was a political player in another sense. He engaged in cultural politics, reexamining the relationship between Islam and modernity in Turkey, particularly the relationship between Islam and science. This is the primary reason he rose to prominence in modern Turkish history. Through *Risale-i Nur*, he attempted to develop a number of platforms for cultural resistance against the authoritarian attitude of the Republic of Turkey officials. Later, Nursi's followers continued this cultural resistance through educational institutions (Said, 2018). When Nursi died in 1960, he left his *Risale-i Nur* as a collection of writings that continue to inspire new generations of Turks who feel trapped between Islamic traditions and anti-religious Republicanism. *Risale-i Nur* shows that the problems and complexities of the relationship between Islam, science, and modernity can be solved.

Disputes among followers of the Nurcu movement after the death of Said Nursi in 1960 regarding the handling of *Risale-i Nur* were the main reasons why the Nurcu movement split into several branches in the 1970s. Yazicilar (a splinter of the Nurcu group of farmers) adopted a literal interpretation, continuing the tradition of writing *Risale-i Nur* in the Arabic alphabet. Yazicilar means 'writer' in Turkish. Meanwhile, Yeni Asyacilar and the Fethullah Gulen movement adapted to the contemporary world by reproducing Nursi's book in Latin on a printing press and eventually establishing a printing and media corporation to propagate the *Risale-i Nur* (Poyraz, 2010, 177). In fact, the Fethullah Gulen movement had complete control over the media and a vast educational network.

Although many researchers have investigated Said Nursi and the Nurcu movement, only a few have looked into *Risale-i Nur*. In some cases, as written by John Voll (Voll, 2002, 33-51), the reason is probably due to language limitations, specifically the mastery of the Turkish language. However, other researchers, such as Serif Mardin (Mardin 1989) and Hakan Yavuz (Yavuz, 2003) argued that there appears to be a structural cause for the absence of attention to the *Risale-i Nur*. Hakan Yavuz did not use textual analysis. Yavuz referred to the use of text analysis as essentialism on the introductory page of his book (Yavuz, 2003, 16).

Yavuz preferred a social constructivism approach in his writings on Said Nursi and the Nurcu movement. The dichotomy between 'textualism' and 'social constructivism' is actually not always binary. If a text is used by a group of people to shape their actions and lives and to build social reality, then a scientist who does not pay attention to the text will be left behind in understanding the construct of that group's reality. Yavuz emphasized that Said Nursi has built a “map” for Muslims (Yavuz, 2003, 157). The question that arises in response to Yavuz's way of arguing is: is it possible to understand what kind of “map” the piece of writing is without paying attention to the text? Hakan Yavuz revealed that there was an ideological and cultural vacuum created by the modernization of the Republic of Turkey. He stressed that *Risale-i Nur* filled this void.

Meanwhile, Serif Mardin argued that *Risale-i Nur* demonstrated a shift in the interaction between Sufi teachers and students by becoming a movement of text readers. At the time, spirituality was formed by reading the *Risale-i Nur* literature rather than doing *tawajjuh* with the tariqat leader (Mardin, 1989, 4). Nursi's biography written by Sukran Vahide (2005) is a mix of adoration and research. Sukran Vahide was able to portray Nursi as well as the perspective of Nurcu's followers in viewing and understanding Said Nursi. Vahide was exceedingly meticulous when he discussed the text of the *Risale-i Nur*. Vahide, like any good Nurcu follower, appeared to believe that Nursi's text was divinely inspired (Vahide, 2005). He did not seem to have done much critical reading of Nursi's *Risale-i Nur*. Furthermore, Vahide disclosed several of Said Nursi's miracles.[1] As a result, while the story of a godless and materialist state official attempting to poison Said Nursi and the miracle of his recovery when he was poisoned is engaging reading and good hagiography, it does not make good scientific writing. If the state's rulers wanted Nursi dead, we can suppose that they could murder him more effectively than by repeatedly giving poison.[2]

Zeynep Akbulut Kuru and Ahmet Kuru examined Said Nursi well when they criticized Mardin's views forcing Nursi to be included in the context of the Naqshabandiyyah (Kuru and Kuru, 2008, 105-106). However, Zeynep Akbulut Kuru and Ahmet Kuru seemed to categorize Nursi's attitude as an apolitical attitude. As they claim, while political Islamists agree with modernists in the Islamic world, such as the need to import Western science and technology, they criticize Westernization because they believe in Islam as a guide in social politics (Kuru and Kuru, 2008, 100). Nursi upheld the country's constitution and supported democracy because he thought that this form of government reflected the Islamic spirit compared to other forms of government. He even presented this state practice with Islamic attire (Vahide, 2005, 86). Although Nursi was open to adopting science and technology from Europe, he opposed the practice of adopting European culture that contradicted Islamic teachings. Nursi's view came from his perspective on Europe, which is apologetic (Brodeur, 2016).

Nursi, in fact, did not totally withdraw from politics. He just shifted from practical to cultural politics. Nursi stated that he should not absorb the negative aspects of European civilization. The Ottomans were encouraged to emulate Japan in absorbing Western civilization by taking what was excellent and whatever culture may aid the country's progress while preserving indigenous customs (Vahide, 2005, 54-55). Nursi did not change his view that Islam is spiritually superior to Western civilization even though he still accepted the need to adopt 'material' aspects from the West. He nurtured this thought to the end of his life.

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[1] The police frequently visited Said Nursi's home in search of the Risale-i Nur. The disciples tried everything they could to hide it. Every day, a police officer named Hafiz Nuri came to Nursi's house. He strangely became ill and died. The same thing happened to another officer, Safvet. Their family feared that they had become sick as a result of Said Nursi's curse prayer. When the family came to apologize to Said Nursi for the actions of the two police officers mentioned above, Said Nursi stated that he had never wished bad things for the two officers. Nursi went on to say that they were ill and died as a result of a curse from the Quran. Similarly, there are additional miraculous stories regarding the authorities' attempt to poison Nursi (Vahid, 2005).

[2] Sheikh Said al-Kurdi, a Kurdish leader of the Naqsyabandiyah order, was sentenced to death for his involvement in the Sheikh Said rebellion in 1925.

Risale-i Nur and Group Identity

Tafsir *Risale-i Nur* is a living corpus that Said Nursi's followers read every day. Observations made during the fieldwork in Jakarta revealed that Nursi's followers read this tafsir before starting their activities. The Nurcu group's followers embrace the teachings contained within it. This tafsir falls under the category of modernist interpretation. This work consists of many pages, arranged using topics rather than the structure of the Qur'an as classical interpretations in general that use verse order. But *Risale-i Nur* uses various themes. *Risale-i Nur* is thus a sort of thematic interpretation, albeit not as systematic. Nursi focused on the fundamental principles of the Qur'an in order to adapt to numerous developments in society, particularly the upheaval between Islam and modernity, where the flow of the philosophy of materialism incorporates science and secularism. Nursi also claimed that *Risale-i Nur* is meant to reinforce these teachings (Sayilgan, 2019).

Risale-i Nur has a unique structure. It is made up of issues relating to modernity, science, and Muslim challenges in the twentieth century. Hamid Algar was an early researcher who highlighted the necessity of understanding the structure of Nursi's work (Algar, 2002, 11-31). *Risale-i Nur* has quite a lot of pages. For Example, standard edition published by Yeni Asya Publishing House consists of the following: *Sozler* (Word), *Mectubat* (Letter), *Lem'alar* (Light), *Sualar* (Rays), *Mesnevi-i Nuriye Ve Isaratu'l I'Caz*, *Tarihce-i Hayat*, *Emirdag Lahikasi*, and *Barla Ve Kastamonu Lahikalari*, *Muhakemat Ve Iman-Kufur Muvazenseli*, and *Asa-Yi Musa Ve Sikke-i Tasdik-I Gaybi*. In Isaratu'l I'caz it appears that Said Nursi used the tahlili method in its interpretation (Nasir, Galib, and Firdaus, 2018; Ghinaurraihal, Zulaiha, and Yunus, 2021).

Said Nursi's work published by Yeni Asya consists of fourteen books, containing 6,000 pages printed in ten volumes. In this book, Nursi discusses broad topics including Islamic teachings, living in the modern world, European civilization, the miracles of the Prophet Muhammad, the miracle of the Qur'an, the comparison of religion and philosophy, the human soul, the importance of five times prayers, the importance of dialogue between Muslims and Christian, Adnan Menderes, and the Democratic Party Government in 1905. It is not surprising that many scientists argued that they did not find a coherent structure in this great work, and revealed that Nursi's writing was not systematic, and jumbled (Mardin, 1989, 160-161).

When reading the *Mektubat*, one would see that these letters were written by Nursi to respond to religious questions presented by his followers. *Mektubat* was written in the aftermath of *Sozler*. In other words, members of the newly created Nurcu movement, influenced by *Sozler*, urged their teachers to clarify numerous concerns that developed that were not addressed in the text. It seems logical that Nursi referred to the entire *Risale-i Nur* book simply as *Sozler* because that book served as the foundation for the entire collection of volumes.

The *Mektubat* is made up of 33 letters, each of which discusses secondary Islamic teachings. The twelfth letter, for example, explores why God created evil, the eighteenth letter addresses *vahdetu'l vucudi* (wahdah al-wudu), and the twenty-third letter discusses the account of the Prophet Yusuf in the Quran and the significance of this story in building faith in the afterlife. The themes in the *Mektubat* are designed to supplement *Sozler*'s discussion of the most fundamental Islamic principles, such as God's oneness, belief in the afterlife, and faith in angels, holy books, and others. The twenty-seventh letter contains the correspondence between Nursi and his students during Nursi's exile, and his

students extolled the benefits they derived from reading the teacher's writings. The letters were published separately under the titles *Emirdag Lahikasi* and *Barla ve Kastamonu Lahikalari* (Nursi, 2002b, 330). These two additional volumes (comprised of three books) are genuinely part of the *Mektubat*. *Mektubat* supplements his previous book, *Sozler.*

Meanwhile, *Sozler* consists of 33 'Words'. When we get to the thirteenth letter, we know that there is a book that was published separately, called *Isaratu'l –I'caz*. In other words, the entire book is known as *Isaretu'l-I'caz*, a book written in the 'Old Said' period in which Said Nursi discusses the principles of interpretation, published as the 13th 'letter'. This discussion is a complement to the *Mektubat* book. Meanwhile, *Mektubat* is a complement to *Sozler*. *Sozler* is the backbone of the entire *Risale-i Nur* structure. The thirty-first chapter, *Lem'alar*, was published as a separate book. *Lem'alar*, like the preceding book, is made up of thirty-three 'Lights'. So, 33 'Words' are supplemented by 33 'Letters,' which in turn contain 33 'Lights' and a number of additions, forming the *Risale-i Nur* fundamental corpus. We must pay attention since the sum of 'Words,' 'Letters,' and 'Light' is 99. This number matches Asma' al-Husna's number. In other words, when someone reads 99 'Words,' 'Letters,' and 'Light,' Nursi described it as an activity of remembrance.

In *Lem'alar* (in other words, the 31st '*Mektuba*t'), it is found that the 27th 'Light' is Nursi's defense at the court of Eksisehir, published separately as part of the *Tarichce-i Hayat* (Biography). Asa result, these works are related to one another. Likewise, the 31st 'Light' was published separately under the title *Sualari*. The whole 31st book 'Light', *Mesnevi-i Nuriye*, was also published as a separate volume. The following details reveal the structure of Nursi's amazing corpus of writings: *Sozler* is at the core of the book, supplemented by *Mektubat*, which includes *the Appendices of Emirlag*, *Barla*, and *Kastamonu*, as well as *Isaretu'l I'cazi* and *Lem'alar*. *Lem'alar* contains *Mesnevi-i Nuriye* and *Sualar (Ray)*. Finally, *Sualar* explicitly refers to Nursi's official biography.

The two volumes are not included in the structure of the *Risale-i Nur*, so they are considered outside the corpus. The two books are *Asa-yi Musa ve Sikke-i Tasdik-i Gaybi*, and *Muhakemat ve Iman-Kufur Muvazeneleri*. There are several interesting reasons why these books are not part of the corpus structure. *The Asa-yi Musa* and *Iman-Kufur Muvazeneleri* books are not original works, but rather the result of a selection of several parts of the *Risale-i Nur*. For example, *Iman-Kufur Muvazeneleri* consists of 'Words' 1-8, 12, 17, and 23; 'Light' 1 and 24; and 'Letters' 1 and 9, and so on. Likewise, *Asa-yi Musa* is a collection of the 7th and 11th 'Sualar' book. The two books seem to be intended for those who do not have time to read the full *Risale-i Nur*. *Muhakemat* is a repetition of Said Nursi's work from before he wrote *Risale-i Nur*. This book appears to have been published by Nursi's students (Nursi 2002c, 163). Another book, *Sikke-i Tasdik-i Gaybi*, was not intended to be included in the Risale-i Nur since it mentions a number of "miracles" (kerametler) associated with Said Nursi. After the Isparta police and court confiscated one of the books, Nursi consented to publish it.

As previously stated, *Sozler* (Words) is made up of 33 'Words'. The first nine 'Words' explain the psychological benefits of believing in God and praying. Nursi used the metaphor of a short narrative to contrast a joyful life based on faith with a life filled with grief for people who live without trust in the hereafter, even knowing that life in this world will eventually end. These first nine 'Words' emphasize the importance of the practical side of religion, particularly the five times prayers. One interesting aspect of *Risale-i Nur* is that at the beginning of Nursi's work, orthopraxis is emphasized more than orthodoxy. In the tenth book of the 'Words', Nursi directed his attention to faith in the

afterlife using theological and philosophical arguments to show the reality of the afterlife as described in the Qur'an. The eleventh 'Word' deals with the 'manifestation of God' in the universe, arguing that nature reflects God's creative abilities. In the 13th and 14th 'Words', Nursi revealed that the Quran is not a book of poetry or a book of philosophy but must be considered as God's revelation for the benefit of mankind. The 16th 'Word' reveals that God can be seen as 'One'. Yet, at the same time, this transcendence is reflected in nature and mankind. The 18th and 19th 'Words' discuss prophethood, particularly the Prophet Muhammad, and emphasize that the prophets are the intermediaries for the revelation of God.

The 20th and 21st 'Words' discuss the miracles of the Qur'an as well as the virtues of prayer and worship. In the 26th 'Word' Nursi elaborates on destiny, qada, and qadar, and explains destiny as a clause that applies to everything in the universe, including human life. The 27th 'Word' is on ijtihad. Here, Nursi emphasizes that the door of ijtihad is still open, but that conducting ijtihad today is more difficult than in the past. Whereas the 28th and 29th 'Words' discuss heaven, hell, and angels, in which Nursi argues that angels must be understood as God's helpers in controlling natural law (Nursi, 2002d, 471). Nursi's book reaches its peak in the 30th 'Word,' in which he compares revelation with philosophy. Nursi describes it as imaginarily walking through a tunnel in the earth created by Greek philosophers Plato and Aristotle, and their followers from the Islamic world such as Ibn Sina, al-Farabi, and Ibn Rushd to find the desire to achieve "ultimate reality." However, these thinkers remained imprisoned in the center of a tunnel, Nursi continued. The 'ultimate reality' (represented by the sun in Nursi's dream) was unknown. Finally, substances such as electricity and mechanical devices were handed to Nursi, and he attempted to use them to discover a route out of the tunnels beneath the earth and appear on the surface. In the end, he discovered sunlight, or "reality." Nursi was taught in a dream by an unknown voice that that substance and aid was the Quran (Nursi, 2002d, 502).

Said Nursi made a distinction between philosophy and revelation. Both are always competing and fighting with one another. When philosophy agrees to serve revelation, true human satisfaction will be realized. Even though Nursi allowed the integration of reason and revelation, he did not force Islam to conform to reason in the way that al-Afghani, Muhammad Abduh, and other Islamic reformers did. According to Nursi's understanding, philosophy must submit to the truth of revelation. Nursi opined the problem with philosophy, particularly the philosophy of materialism that serves as the foundation of science, is that philosophy openly refuses to serve 'revelation,' causing tension in human psychology as a result of science not being connected to God. As a result, the topic raised in *Sozler* is the pillars of faith and other fundamental principles (Syauqi, 2017). Nursi's major objective in *Risale-i Nur* is to revitalize Islam in the midst of the modernization of the contemporary Turkish Republic by highlighting the essential teachings of Islam and adapting these teachings to modern human tastes.

Tafsir *Risale-i Nur* was born in Turkey during the advent of the materialist philosophy of science in the twentieth century. This boom started when the Ottomans began to embrace science, which was expanding quickly in Europe at the time. To understand *Risale-i Nur* more completely, it is required to have a thorough understanding of nineteenth-century materialist philosophy, particularly nineteenth-century German materialism. *Risale-i Nur* effectively demonstrates Said Nursi's understanding of materialist groups' works and principles. Nursi positioned himself as an opponent of the

materialist tradition, particularly the 19th-century materialist philosophy championed by Ludwig Buchner, Karl Vogt, and Jacob Mleschott.

When Said Nursi appeared in court in Eskisehir in 1935 to defend himself on charges of undermining and trying to destroy the secular Turkish Republic, he highlighted that all of his writings were not intended to be directed against the Turkish Republic, but rather towards European philosophers (Nursi, 2002e, 204). According to Said Nursi's statement at the court hearing, *Risale-i Nur* was composed to respond to European philosophers who were actively proclaiming the philosophy of materialism. In his subsequent trial in Denizli in 1943, Nursi refused to let a council of experts convened by the court conduct an analysis of the *Risale-i Nur* to determine whether the book challenged the Turkish Republic's secularism. Instead, Nursi requested that the court present a council of European philosophers (Nursi 2002e, 349). Several of Nursi's writings, including the 23rd 'Light,' contain principles that contradict European philosophers' claims about science and nature. *Risale-i Nur* was published to silence European philosophers' materialism and naturalism theories, as well as their attacks on the Quran (Vahide, 2005, 224).

A close examination of the *Risale-i Nur* reveals that this work criticizes nineteenth-century materialist philosophy, particularly German vulgar materialism.[3] Ludwig Buchner and Karl Vogt were natural scientists with an agenda to distance people from religion. In Germany, the agenda of this materialist group elicited two responses. Friedrich Nietzsche was the first to respond, claiming that the materialist group's attitude to nature caused intellectual aridity and contributed to dehumanization (Nietzsche, 1974, 335). Nietzsche's attack was directed primarily at David Strauss (Nietzsche, 1990). The second response came from neo-Kantians like Julius Frauenstadt (1813-1879). Frauenstadt challenged the materialists' assertion that they were devoid of metaphysics and religion and that they utilized their senses to uncover scientific theories and natural laws, as a metaphysical belief that contradicted their own statements.

As a result of this neo-Kantian attack, materialist groups lost their influence in Europe, especially in Germany in the second half of the nineteenth century.[4] Interestingly, despite their declining impact in Germany, their aura remained strong among Ottoman philosophers. In fact, materialist ideas regarding science and religion echoed among Ottoman intellectuals, particularly in the circle of the military medical school, an Istanbul-based college. This materialist idea later became the Republic of Turkey's educational policy under the Kemalist regime (Hanioglu, 2005).

Although Nursi's rejection of materialist philosophy is similar to that of neo-Kantian, the two are not the same. According to Said Nursi, Turkish materialists such as Abdullah Cevdet, Baha Tevfik, and Besir Fuad made a mistake in their conception of the cosmos, claiming that it is a closed and self-sustaining system. Said Nursi highlighted the universe's reliance on God. Sukran Vahide said that young Said Nursi's interest in science led him to believe that the universe rotates like a machine and a factory made up of various parts, and that, while this view is similar to Newton's, Nursi's view is following Quranic teachings, which he refers to as *'mana-i lit'* (Vahide, 2005, 234).

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[3] Karl Marx coined the term 'vulgar materialist' to distinguish the naïve materialism of the German scientists who followed Ludwig Feuerbach, such as Karl Vogt, Ludwig Buchner, and Jacob Moleschott.

[4] Karl R. Popper launched another attack when vulgar materialism resurfaced in the early twentieth century under the cover of Logical Positivism.

To understand the contents of the *Risale-i Nur*, an understanding of Nursi's concept of *mana-i ismi* (nominal meaning) and *mana-i harfi* (significative meaning) is needed (Coruh, 2019). Nursi developed this concept in the 12th 'Word' (Nursi, 2002d, 121-122), which emphasizes that all natural phenomena have two characteristics: immanent meaning (*mana-i ismi*) relating to natural law, and transcendence meaning (*mana-i harfi*) which signifies God is the creator of the cosmos. The logical error of materialist philosophy, according to Said Nursi, is when they reject the transcendent interpretation and choose an immanent meaning, such as calling the nature of the universe to move on its own, which is referred to as natural law. The concept of nature's reliance on God is a fundamental concept in the Qur'an (Rahman, 1980, 3). Nursi used this concept to broaden the scope of rational argumentation in theological dialectics and to strengthen the position of theological contemplation within the Sufi tradition (Tuna, 2017).

Materialist philosophy adherents with atheistic tendencies believe that God cannot be found in nature and that the universe is self-sustaining and immanent. However, Said Nursi disagreed with them. He highlighted that atheist societies are oxymorons that will be destroyed (Nursi, 2002f). Nursi's objections to materialist philosophy and all European cultural traditions originated from his resistance to both materialist philosophy and atheism. He wrote a letter to Adnan Menderes, Turkey's Prime Minister who was concerned about Islam, to express his fears about the impact of the materialist philosophy of Western civilization (Nursi, 2002a, 318). Nursi was also against all forms of cultural imitation of European civilization (Nursi, 2002a, 456). On another occasion, Nursi criticized Western civilization for ruining the family and forcing women to work outside the home in inappropriate clothing (Nursi 2002e, 374). Nursi's additional thoughts on covering the genitals and the hijab can be found in the 24th 'Light' (Nursi, 2002b, 255-264).

Several Ottoman thinkers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, such as Mehmet Akif Ersoy, Sehbenderzade Ahmed Hilmi, and Said Halim, argued that there was a barrier between the 'material' and 'spiritual' Europeans. As a result, they absorbed material aspects of European culture such as constitutional systems of government, science, and technology, but rejected spiritual aspects such as ethics and behavior, secular attitudes, and attitudes toward religion. Nursi, like the scholars mentioned above, opposed cultural and social adoption from Europe, such as open clothes for women, the drinking of alcohol and liquor, and other behavior that is antithetical to Islamic teachings because this is the line between being a devoted Muslim and not. Nursi was willing to accept Western material components, but he was against Western cultural adoption.

Said Nursi's views and attitudes, as outlined in the *Risale-i Nur*, eventually become an essential identity for Said Nursi's Nurcu movement followers. This identity allows Muslims to not abandon scientific and technological developments when dealing with modernity, science, and technology because they do not contradict Islam as long as they are devoid of atheistic and materialistic aspects that deny the existence of God. Indeed, if modernity, science, and technology enhance one's faith, then all modern-era mental diseases will be treated, because mental illnesses may be overcome by enhancing one's faith (Zarkasyi et al., 2019). Until, in the end, the environment, living beings, and the universe are preserved as a result of strong faith and the role of humans as caliphs (Yucel, 2018).

Nursi's ideas created the foundation for the Nurcu movement's identity, which subsequently encouraged his followers to catch up with science and try to master it. The Nurcu movement's position on catching up with science departs from Said Nursi's

teachings, which are concerned with the human condition in the midst of modern nature, the relationship between religion and modern life, and the role of religion in the midst of tension between tradition and modernity. Nursi's primary purpose was to revive religion in a secularized world and to preserve the Turkish people's Muslim identity in the face of modernization. He also believed that Islam could exist in the modern world without relying on political authority. In this regard, Nursi differs from other Muslim philosophers such as Sayyid Qutub, Hassan al-Banna, and Mawdudi, who emphasized 'Islam as politics' rather than 'Islam as religion' (Alatas, 2017).

CONCLUSION

The flow of modernization carried out by the Republic of Turkey's government with the embrace of European culture had an impact on the incorporation of a materialist worldview that believes God does not exist. In the middle of this modernization, it was predicted that Islam's status would become extinct. The Turkish people's Muslim identity was under threat. Science, which was supposed to modernize Turkish society, instead alienated people from their original identity, notably Muslim identity. Furthermore, secularization diminished the position of religion, which was once quite strong under the Ottoman Empire's reign. This condition worried Said Nursi. Nursi's method of coping with and responding to the feelings was to write, which then became Tafsir *Risale-i Nur*. *Risale-i Nur* was written to protect the Turkish people's Muslim identity, in addition to criticizing various atheistic arguments from science and the rise of European philosophy that had penetrated the foundations of the Republic of Turkey's society. The emergence of *Risale-i Nur* was warmly welcomed by the Turkish people, particularly in rural areas. The government of the Republic of Turkey carried out a top-down modernization process, and therefore the grassroots believed that the process of modernization and secularization had robbed them of their identity as Muslims.

Risale-i Nur has become an important identity for the Nurcu movement in the midst of Turkey's modernization and secularization. With this identity, the position of the Nurcu movement is strengthening, supported by a defined mission, namely to build a new civilization on the integration of modernity and Islam. *Risale-i Nur* is a Turkish Modernist interpretation. It examines in depth the spiritual consequences that arise from modernization driven by advances in science and technology. Material development in European civilization, according to Nursi, would create a spiritual void in humans if it is not accompanied by increasing the spiritual realm. *Risale-i Nur* is intended to explain the decline of spirituality in the midst of modernism. Nursi considered modernity as a threat to Islam because it glorifies reason and science, both of which are atheistic. It is not surprising then that Nursi urged Muslims to fight what he saw as the evil of modern-day atheism.

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