IDENTITY AND THE NUR MOVEMENT IN TURKEY:
"TRYING TO SEE THE GRAY"

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ABSTRACT

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This thesis analyzes the identity of the *Nur* movement in Turkey from the *emic* perspective on two levels, the group and the individual. Research was conducted through semi-structured, in-depth interviews with ten university students who identify themselves as *Nur* students. With regard to group identity, first, the emergence and function of the movement is considered in light of Norbert Elias's "Changes in the We-I Balance," concluding that the movement constitutes an important "survival unit" for the students, for some even taking the place of the nation-state. Second, an attempt is made to define the boundaries that exist vis-à-vis non-adherents, other Islamic groups, and between the sub-groups within the movement itself per Fredrik Barth and Thomas Hylland Eriksen's theories. Several important boundary markers are identified including such things as language, dress, value orientations, differing approaches to religion (rational versus imitative or emotional), social involvement, political involvement and attitudes toward the *Risale-i Nur*. Finally, the impact of the movement on one's individual identity is considered, utilizing Richard Jenkins's model of the internal-external dialectic. Regarding the external, it was determined that the "outside other" creates the need

for identity negotiation and restricted interaction, while the "inside other" prescribes some important values, including education and nationalism. The internal half of the identity dialectic, it was concluded, is significantly shaped by one's interaction with the *Risale-i Nur*.

Keywords: Identity, *Nur* Movement, Said Nursi

ÖZ

TÜRKİYE'DEKİ NUR HAREKETİ VE KİMLİK:
"GRİYİ GORMEYE ÇALIŞMAK"

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Yüksek Lisans, Orta Doğu Araştırmaları

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Bu tezde, Türkiye'deki Nur hareketinin kimliği hem grup hem birey düzeyinde emik bir yaklaşımla incelenmektedir. Araştırma, kendilerini "*Risale-i Nur* talebesi" olarak tanımlayan on üniversite öğrencisi ile yapılan derinlemesine mülakatlar aracılığıyla gerçekleştirilmiştir. Öncelikle, grup kimliği açısından, hareketin ortaya çıkışı ve işlevi, Norbert Elias'in denemesi "Biz-Ben Dengesinde Değişimler" ışığında ele alınmış ve hareketin talebeler için önemli bir "hayatta kalma birimi" oluşturduğu, hatta bazıları için ulus-devletin bile yerini aldığı sonucuna varılmıştır. İkinci olarak, Fredrik Barth ve Thomas Hylland Eriksen'in kuramları çerçevesinde, Nur hareketini takip edenleri etmeyenlerden ve diğer İslami gruplardan ayıran sınırların belirlenmesinin yanı sıra, hareketin kendi içindeki alt grupları birbirinden ayıran sınırlar da tanımlanmaya çalışılmıştır. Dilde, giyimde, ahlaki eğilimlerde, dine yaklaşımda (akılcıya karşı taklitçi veya duygusal), toplumsal katılım, siyasal katılım ve *Risale-i Nur*'a karşı tutumlardaki farklılıklar da dahil olmak üzere çok sayıda önemli ayırt edici işaret belirlenmiştir. Son olarak, Richard Jenkins'in içsel-dışsal diyalektik modeli kullanılarak, hareketin kişinin birey kimliği üzerindeki etkisi ele alınmıştır. Dışsal olan hakkında şu bulguya varılmıştır: "dışarıdaki öteki" kimlik

uzlaşması ve kısıtlı etkileşim gereksinimi doğurmaktayken, "içerideki öteki" eğitim ve milliyetçilik gibi bazı önemli değerleri dayatmaktadır. Kimlik diyalektiğinin içe ait olan kısmının önemli oranda kişinin *Risale-i Nur* ile olan etkileşimiyle şekillendiği sonucuna ulaşılmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Kimlik, Nur Hareketi, Said Nursi

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

This thesis began with a rather basic problematic: to shed light on the identity of students of the *Risale-i Nur* (*Risale-i Nur talebeleri,* hereafter *Nur* students)[1] both with regard to their individual sense of self and that of the group which they together constitute. For those unfamiliar with *Nur* students and the movement which they compose, allow me to offer a brief introduction before returning to the specificities of the study at hand. The *Nur* movement centers on the writings and teachings of Said Nursi, whose compiled Koranic commentary (the *Risale-i Nur*) numbers 6,000 pages. Despite the prominence of Nursi's personage in the movement, Nursi himself stated, and his contemporary followers continue to emphasize, that the movement was not built upon an individual leader but rather upon a text, the *Risale*. The text enlightens readers about the truths in the Koran, specifically as they may be understood in the context of the twentieth century, thus providing a means by which to live out Islam in the modern age through the fusion of modern science and Islamic thought. This fusion also results in the movement's strong emphasis on education, rational thought and logic as the means by which belief may be both attained and sustained. Nursi did not set out to establish a movement or a *tarikat* (Islamic religious order), but rather sought to encourage faith and renew belief (Mardin, 1989: 96). Despite this lack of emphasis on the movement's establishment or growth, however, it has become a large, transnational social religious movement, with its readers numbering in the millions both in Turkey

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[1] I have chosen to use the term student of the *Risale-i Nur*, or *Nur* student, instead of the term *Nurcu* out of respect for some of those who I interviewed who found the term *Nurcu* to be pejorative. My choice to refer to the collective whole of *Nur* students as the *Nur* movement is explained and defended in a footnote in the second chapter of this thesis, in section 2.3 entitled "The *Nur* Movement After Nursi."

and abroad.[2] Some have even sited the movement as encompassing nearly ten percent of the Turkish population (Reed, 2003: 35), though any definite numbers would be difficult to verify. Exact numbers aside, it is sufficient to note that it is a significant, influential movement. It should also be mentioned that, following Nursi's death in 1960, the movement fragmented into several smaller units, though they all still consider themselves as falling under the *Nur* movement umbrella.[3] How these divisions occurred and the ways in which the groups differ from one another will be taken up in Chapter Four.

Appreciating its importance and expansiveness, as well as its complexity with regard to ambiguous membership and intra-movement heterogeneity, this study seeks to help define the *Nur* movement's identity on the group and individual planes. The research, conducted through semi-structured in-depth interviews, aimed to answer such questions as the way in which being a student of the *Risale-i Nur* shapes the adherents' daily lives and major decisions, how they understand themselves in relation to those around them who are not *Nur* students, how they as a group converge with or deviate from the beliefs and practices of other Islamic groups in Turkey and how the smaller groups within the movement differentiate themselves from one another. I had envisioned presenting the results of my research in a thematic manner, taking up one by one issues like nationalism, community life, gender, education, family life, political involvement, etc, and sketching, if somewhat roughly, a picture of a typical *Nur* student. My naiveté now appalls me. An

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[2] The open and fluid nature of the outer boundaries of this movement, as will be discussed in Chapter Four of this study (See 4.3.4 "Boundary Characteristics: Fixed vs. Fluid, Open vs. Closed"), make any exact numbering of the membership virtually impossible, but it is commonly understood to consist of millions.

[3] I will not attempt here to list off all of the various units or sub-groups within the *Nur* movement for two reasons: First, I found in the interviews that the *Nur* students themselves rarely identified these groups by name, and often resisted doing so even when pressed directly about it. Second, two of my interviewees claimed to not be affiliated with any sub-group at all, and thus, by defining in concrete terms the specific heterogeneity of the *Nur* movement, one might inadvertently exclude a significant portion of the followers. For a more concrete discussion of these group divisions, please see the following two articles:
Yavuz, M. Hakan. "*Nur* Study Circles (*Dershanes*) and the Formation of New Religious Consciousness in Turkey." Islam at the Crossroads: On the Thought and Life of Bediüzzaman Said Nursi. Ed. Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabi. Albany: SUNY Press, 2003, 297-316.
Karabaşoğlu, Metin. "Text and Community: An Analysis of the *Risale-i Nur* Movement." Islam at the Crossroads: On the Life and Thought of Bediüzzaman Said Nursi. Ed. Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabi. Albany: SUNY Press, 2003, 263-296.

alternative method of interpreting and presenting my research will be addressed and defended in detail in the third chapter, the methodology chapter. For now, suffice it to say that the intricacy of the identity question is such that we cannot speak of a "typical *Nur* student."

It does not, however, follow that the question of identity in connection with the *Nur* movement is an invalid or inappropriate one. Indeed, as will be seen shortly, the relationship between identity, its construction and the *Nur* movement has often been addressed in the relevant social science literature. Therefore, not only has the appropriateness of this problematic been justified by scholars, but, on a more personal and, I think, compelling level, it is also defensible in light of the daily experiences and conversations of one active in Turkish society. Indeed, my own particular interest in this question stemmed from such societal interactions, when I became aware that, regardless of what identity *Nur* students individually or as a group may claim for themselves, many outside of the movement have already branded them with a label. I first appreciated this reality while listening to the following anecdote recounted firsthand by the teacher involved:

Picture a classroom at a respected private university in Turkey. Freshman students file in, some eagerly and others begrudgingly, to resume their conversation about one of life's most basic questions, its meaning, through a review of what various religions and other ideologies have to say on the subject. As class begins, the teacher distributes freshly copied sheets, a short treatise on the meaning of life from yet another perspective. This time, however, the name of the author has been removed. The students must consider the author's thoughts alone first before the name will be revealed. The teacher states only that the author is a Turk and asks for reactions to the text. The students are overwhelmingly positive in their comments, finding the author's thoughts on life's purpose to be enlightened and accurate. As the discussion winds down, the students' curiosity gets the best of them and they plead to know who the author is. After several wrong guesses, the teacher finally discloses the author's identity: Fethullah Gülen. The reaction of some of the students is startling. Many gasp in horror. One shoves the paper from his desk onto the floor in revulsion, resentful at having been tricked into concurring with Gülen.

Not all the students react so violently, of course, but the anger and disgust on the part of many is notable.

While the nature of the relationship between Gülen and the *Nur* movement is debatable, with some categorizing him as an adherent of the movement and some distinguishing him from it, it is clear that there is a relationship, whatever its form, and thus the implication of the story remains relevant: many outside of the movement are fiercely opposed to it based, not on its premises and beliefs (in fact in the anecdote the students unknowingly concurred with these), but rather on its perceived identity. Fred A. Reed in his article entitled, "In the Footsteps of Said Nursi," recounts the perceived identity of the *Nur* movement from various perspectives and schools of thought in Turkey:

> [*Nur* students] collaborate with the military and with the right-wing political parties, say impatient students and left-wing radicals. They are quietists and mystics whose passive behavior only strengthens the state, say the anthropologists, political scientists, and the proponents of political Islam. They are a *tariqa*, a Sufi 'religious order' in new, modernist clothing, say the professional atheists who write for Istanbul's big circulation daily newspapers. They are dangerous fundamentalists, bent on submerging Turkey in a rising religious tide and taking over the government and the regime, warn the militant (and often military) secularists who view the community's dead namesake as the 'very incarnation of backwardness.' (Reed, 2003: 35)

Whether or not Reed has been completely accurate in his account of these diverse opinions is the matter for another study. However, the very fact that he found so many perceptions to record indicates that *Nur* students have indeed been labeled by those outside the movement. I have found the same to be true in my own experience. When asked about my thesis topic, I have received a variety of responses from warm interest to suspicion to outright dismay. The only response I have not received is an indifferent one. Whatever opinion people hold regarding the *Nur* movement, they appear to hold it strongly. In a large part because of the fervor of these responses, I wanted to understand how the *Nur* students themselves, rather than just those outside the movement, conceive of their own identity. It was only

later that I discovered within the social science literature that the relationship between the *Nur* movement and identity is a prevalent theme.[4]

1.1 Nursi and Identity: A Literature Review

In studies regarding Nursi, his work and his influence on Turkish society, frequent references are made to identity construction. Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabi speaks of the way in which the *Risale-i Nur*, Nursi's magnum opus, aids in the establishment of a new Muslim identity. He describes the *Risale-i Nur* as, "a modern Muslim theological text that grapples with both historical and philosophical problems, and that attempts to construct a Muslim identity in the modern period that meets the challenges of radical secularism" (Abu-Rabi, 2003, "Introduction": ix). In another article, Abu-Rabi further solidifies this relationship between Nursi and identity by characterizing Nursi as one who "advocates the creation of a modern Islamic Self, which is compatible with the challenges of modernity" (Abu-Rabi, 2003, "How to Read": 68). Thus according to Abu-Rabi's interpretation, Nursi himself as well as his work encourages the formation of a specific identity, one which encompasses both traditional Islam and modern reality. Nursi and his work may therefore be understood as a shaper or constructor of identity in the lives of his followers.

M. Hakan Yavuz expands this relationship between Nursi and identity in his introduction to a special edition of the Muslim World which focuses on Bediüzzaman Said Nursi. Yavuz classifies the *Nur* movement as a whole as "an identity-seeking movement" (Yavuz, 1999: 194), a categorization on which he later elaborates with the following description:

> The Nurcu movement has responded most effectively to the search for identity which has been a salient characteristic of Turkish politics since the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. Through religiously rooted and socially shaped networks, the Nurcus, participants of the Nurcu movement, have sought to establish a sense of community within a laicist state. The Nurcu reading circles, or *dershanes*, have become the institutions which integrate the individual into society and polity. (Yavuz, 1999: 195)

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[4] It seems necessary before proceeding to comment upon my working definition of "identity." However, as it is also fitting to address it in reference to the methodology and as the digression to define identity here would be a significant one, I will postpone said definition until Chapter Three. For now I simply seek to establish the connection between Nursi and identity, thereby justifying the appropriateness of such a topic in light of the relevant social science research.

Thus not only are Nursi himself and the *Risale-i Nur* taken to be involved in identity construction, but the movement that has sprung from these two influences and is active in Turkish society today also plays a role in shaping its followers' sense of self. Yavuz attributes this need for identity construction to the collapse of the Ottoman Empire which resulted in a fundamental change in Turkish society, instigating an intense search for identity.

Such an analysis echoes that of Şerif Mardin, who considers the effects of modernization and secularization on Turkish society in his study, <u>Religion and Social Change in Modern Turkey: The Case of Bediüzzaman Said Nursi</u>. Here Mardin underlines "de-personalization" as one of the most basic consequences of the changes taking place at this time and, like Yavuz, cites Nursi and the *Nur* movement as one of the means for filling this void:

> The changes which occurred in the Ottoman Empire during the *Tanzimat*, and continued during the Republic attacked the traditional Ottoman system by the extent to which it 'de-personalized' it. […] Eventually it was to be this gap which Said Nursi filled by setting out to repersonalize Turkish society through the personalized stamp of the *Risale-i Nur.* (Mardin, 1989: 12)

Indeed, Mardin moves one step beyond Yavuz in that he does not simply attribute an identity constructing role to the *Nur* movement, but in many ways understands identity-construction to be an explanation for its very existence. Mardin interprets Nursi's appeal and his ability to attract followers as being largely the result of the destabilizing ramifications of a society in flux. The societal networks and connections by which his followers had previously defined themselves have been shaken and thus they are seeking a way to reconstruct their fledging sense of identity. As Mardin (1989: 14) states, "Bediüzzaman's disciples were drawn to him by the feeling that a key element had been driven out of the social structure in which they were immersed, a sense similar to that of a man who is sitting at a table with one of the legs somewhat shorter than the others." Thus Mardin views the very formation of Nursi's following to be in many respects the product of the followers' need to reinsert themselves into a more stable, personal social structure in reference to which they could construct an identity. He reiterates this reading toward the end of his study:

Up to this point my description of Said Nursi's influence has centered on the processes which attracted a clientele through the relevance of his teachings to this set of persons in their quality as individuals. These were problems concerned with the elaboration of the self, issues related to the shaping of an identity. (Mardin, 1989: 201)

Mardin thus argues that Nursi's ability to function as an identity-constructor was fundamental in the growth of Nursi's original following.

Not all scholars interpret the situation as such, however. Camilla Nereid in her study, In the Light of Said Nursi: Turkish Nationalism and the Religious Alternative, calls into question Mardin's assertion that there had been a fundamental change in the social structure. While she acknowledges the prevalence of secularism and the undermining of religion on the part of the new government in Ankara, she claims that such a change in society at large could not have occurred so rapidly, as Islam had been the basis of social interaction for centuries. Thus, she contends that the networks that Mardin claims are lacking actually continued to exist:

Religion was and had been a major part of the Turks' identity for centuries. It had shaped their complete mentality. It was therefore unlikely that any attempt to destroy this mentality and replace it with a nationalist ideology would have immediate success. (Nereid, 1997: 33)

Despite this divergence of opinion regarding the state of society due to modernization and secularization, however, Nereid does seem to agree with Mardin on the most important point for our purposes here; she too understands Nursi to be presenting his followers with something very personal, something by which they can better understand themselves in relation to the world around them. Though she does not use the word specifically, Nereid too seems to indicate that what Nursi offered his followers was a sense of identity:

Said Nursi and his followers did not necessarily have the same goals. While Said Nursi's aim was to strengthen and renew Islam in such a way that it could function as a meaningful reference for the twentieth century, his followers gathered around him in order to create meaning in their own private lives. (Nereid, 1997: 31)

Thus even if the explanations for why Nursi's followers desire meaning and, with it, identity, vary from scholar to scholar, that Nursi met these very personal needs seems to be unanimous.

Indeed, Mehmet Kırkıncı, a *Nur* student himself, describes the way in which the Nursi's works minister to him on a very personal level: "I free my loneliness through these books. I examine myself and my history within and between the lines of the *Risale-i Nur*" (Yavuz, 1999: 198). It is through the lens of Nursi's writing that Kırkıncı, like other *Nur* students, understand who they are in reference to the world around them; it is through this lens that they identify themselves and thus the question of identity and identity construction becomes an appropriate framework in which to study the *Nur* movement.

1.2 The Scope of the Study

This study seeks to consider identity in relation to the *Nur* movement in Turkey in two ways: first, the way in which those within the *Nur* movement understand and express the movement's identity vis-à-vis other groups either within or outside the movement and, second, the way in which being a *Nur* student shapes one's personal identity. To accomplish these purposes, semi-structured in-depth personal interviews were conducted with those who identified themselves as "*Risale-i Nur talebleri*." Any further confirmation of their involvement was not required (such as extent or length of involvement); they had simply to identify themselves as such. A total of ten interviews were conducted, all of them in Turkish.[5] The following analysis draws from all ten. Seven of the interviewees were men and three were women.[6] While the gender ratio seems uneven at first glance, it is probably a close representation of the male-female composition of the group itself. Though there are no definite numbers of *Nur* students by which such percentages may be determined, the interviewees themselves confirmed that it continues to be a male-dominated movement. The pool of interviewees was limited to university students (though one just graduated recently from university) in the

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[5] For a list of the basic questions I asked the interviewees, along with the prior assumptions I had regarding their answers, see Appendix C. It should be noted, however, that because the interviews were only semi-structured in nature, there were deviations, sometimes significant ones, from the questions and assumptions presented here.

[6] For descriptions of the individual interviewees, please see Appendix A, where they are listed, along with an accompanying sketch, alphabetically by pseudonym. All of the names used to refer to interviewees have, of course, been changed to protect their privacy. The names utilized serve only to reflect the gender of the person speaking.

three largest cities in Turkey: Istanbul (4), Ankara (3) and Izmir (3), with the hope that such a narrowing would help to eliminate differences in self-perception that could otherwise be attributed to generational or geographical discrepancies. Granted, the familial and geographical background of the interviewees remains diverse, but their age and current life experiences are very similar. It is also significant that these young people constitute what will very soon be the heart of the *Nur* movement as they assume leadership positions in the movement itself and other important stations in the country at large. Thus, this study may also be said to in some way envisage the future of the movement as well.

At the same time, however, this study makes no claims to be representative of the movement as a whole because the sample itself does not possess the necessary diversity or magnitude to be considered as such. Perhaps most obviously, the study has been limited to the movement in Turkey, not addressing the considerable weight of the movement which exists outside of the country. And even within Turkey, the sample should not be understood as typical. Indeed, given that all of those interviewed are studying at universities, many of them at Turkey's best universities, they should be seen as a privileged group, at least in terms of educational opportunities. Eight of the ten studied at private schools affiliated with the *Nur* religious community (*cemaat* schools), which they identified as offering a superior education. Many would also be considered privileged in an economic sense, as indicated by the education level of their parents. Though certainly not the case for all of the interviewees, some come from family backgrounds which set them distinctly apart from the majority of society. Three of the interviewees (Demir, Emre and Yasemin), for example, have parents that have both completed at least a Bachelor's degree at the university level, an extremely unusual occurrence given their generation in Turkey.

The representative nature of the sample is also problematic with relation to the various sub-groups which constitute the *Nur* movement. I was not able to secure interviews with individuals from all of these different segments. Indeed, two of the groups which are often discussed in the literature (the *Yazcılar* (Writers) and the Med-Zehra community, i.e. the Kurdish followers of Nursi) are notably absent from this sample only because my personal contacts did not allow for the necessary

connections to be established. Furthermore, the Gülen group may have been over-represented as two of the interviewees identified themselves outright with this group and four others referred to Gülen's writings frequently. This was further complicated by a seeming resistance on the part of many of the interviewees to identify themselves by name with any particular group, even when asked directly if they would do so. Thus I left as an analyst not even knowing with which group many of my interviewees could be said to be affiliated, a problem which may be indicative of the desire to express the unity of the group over any diversity. And finally, two interviewees spoke of being attached to no sub-group at all, preferring to identify themselves only with Nursi. Because of these concerns, this study may not be said to represent the totality of the movement in any respect.

1.3 The Organization and General Argument of the Chapters

Excluding the present introductory chapter, which serves mainly as a justification of the study of the *Nur* movement in reference to identity and an outline of the study's research methods, there are five other chapters in this study. The following one, Chapter Two, establishes an historical foundation of Said Nursi and the Nur movement by identifying four predominant themes central to Nursi's life, his writing and the movement itself. These four themes, all of which continue to be important to understanding the *Nur* movement today, are appraised in light of both the historical events of Nursi's life and times and the thought encompassed in his writings. The chapter ends with a brief review of the history and development of the *Nur* movement after Nursi's death in 1960.

The third chapter is a methodology segment which lays the theoretical foundation for the thesis. It seeks first to define the concept of identity as it will be employed in this study, and then proceeds to take up in more detail the problematics to be addressed. Considering first group and then individual identity, this chapter outlines the theoretical frameworks which will be utilized in analyzing the interviews and then details the specific research questions which follow upon said frameworks. It concludes with a discussion of subjectivity with regard to both the interviewees themselves and to me as an analyst.

The fourth and most extensive chapter presents and analyzes the interviews conducted with respect to group identity in two segments. First, it considers the *Nur* movement in light of Norbert Elias's concept of the "survival unit," and the extent to which the movement itself may be said to comprise such a unit for its adherents. This discussion further incorporates an analysis of the *Nur* movement's relationship with the nation-state. The second segment takes up the theory of boundary construction and maintenance as a means to assess group identity as outlined by Thomas Hylland Eriksen and Fredrik Barth. It then proceeds to analyze the boundaries which are constructed and maintained by the *Nur* movement on three levels, each of which represents an increasing degree of specificity: the *Nur* adherents vis-à-vis non-adherents, the *Nur* movement vis-à-vis other Islamic groups, and the sub-groups within the *Nur* movement vis-à-vis one another.

The fifth chapter addresses the question of individual identity utilizing Richard Jenkins' internal-external dialectic model, as well as drawing once again from the boundary theories of Fredrik Barth. The external's role in the synthesis of individual identity is considered both with respect to those not included in the *Nur* movement (the "outside other") and those within the movement but external to the individual self (the "inside other"). The internal portion of the dialectic is also briefly assessed, exploring the ways in which individual identity is influenced by internal self-definitions as shaped by the *Risale-i Nur*.

Chapter Six offers a brief conclusion, presenting a few of my own observations as an analyst made during the interview process.

CHAPTER 2

HISTORY OF NURSI AND THE NUR MOVEMENT

A proper understanding of the contemporary *Nur* movement cannot be conceived of apart from a brief review of the history from which it emerges. The reason for this necessity stems not solely from the facile observation that we are all, movements and people alike, products of our histories, either as an extension, a rejection or some synthesis of the two, though this must certainly be the case. Rather, this historical perspective is all the more required with regard to the *Nur* movement because of the *extent* to which history permeates the movement today, especially with regard to the legacy of the personhood and thought of Bediüzzaman Said Nursi. Thus his personal history, both in terms of actual historical events and also a foundation in his thoughts and ideas, must be accounted for before proceeding. In so doing many of the themes which still define the movement today will be introduced. A short overview of the history of the movement itself after Nursi's death will follow, thereby completing the groundwork upon which a study of the contemporary *Nur* movement in Turkey may be built.

2.1 A Caveat: The Need for Balance

To examine Nursi's life and work in the context of his times is actually not a simple matter. As one begins to approach this task a weighty and contested question quickly surfaces: *to what degree* can or should Nursi and his ideas be interpreted in light of his historical context? One must navigate between a historical, deterministic approach which views Nursi's work primarily as a product of his times and one which views Nursi's contribution mainly as that of an intrinsic religious experience detached from historical circumstances. Metin Karabaşoğlu brings this debate to the fore in his reading of Şerif Mardin's study, Religion and Social Change in Modern Turkey: the Case of Bediüzzaman Said Nursi. Karabaşoğlu finds Mardin's study to

be unduly focused on the effect of modernity upon Nursi and his work to the exclusion of religious factors. Though he doesn't endorse a complete disregard for Nursi's life circumstances, Karabaşoğlu finds the single lens of modernity to be problematic: "Yes, [Nursi] lived in modern times. However, Nursi's main concern was neither to oppose nor support modernity. When his thought is examined solely from the perspective of modernity, the spiritual foundations of his life tend to be neglected" (Karabaşoğlu, 2003: 263). Rather than understand Nursi in light of his environment, Karabaşoğlu advocates a focus on the theological, and thereby timeless, aspects of Nursi's message such as "sincerity in worship, devotion, God's approval, knowledge of God, and love of God," concepts for which he asserts there is "no place in Mardin's study" (Karabaşoğlu, 2003: 263). He rejects an approach which, from his perspective, views Nursi's work as predominantly influenced by the struggle of Turkish society with a budding modernity, finding this to be an insufficient framework to encompass the whole of Nursi and his contribution.

Whether or not we accept Karabaşoğlu's understanding of Mardin's work is largely extraneous to the topic at hand. Its presence here simply highlights the need to be aware of a debate within the literature on Nursi with reference to history. It follows that we must tread carefully forward in considering the history of the Nursi himself and the *Nur* movement as a whole, not denying the fact that the context in which Nursi lived shaped his work, but also not defining him as simply a consequence thereof. Perhaps this balance, this middle ground, if you will, is best expressed by Fred A. Reed in his personal account of his search for Nursi in the Anatolian heartland:

> No more can a Said Nursi […] be explained simply by his family, social, natural and intellectual environment, than by the currently fashionable binary and genetic reductionism, or by DNA analysis. [He] must be defined in [his] own terms. But not only in those terms. Wonders of the age are children of the age as well, and they speak its language. (Reed, 1999: 101)

Nursi did indeed speak the language of his day, though it was not the only language he spoke, and the language of his age still resonates in the conversations and attitudes of the adherents of the *Nur* movement today.

2.2 Nursi's Life and Times: Four Themes

A thorough biography of Nursi's life and times seems not only unnecessary for the purposes of this study, but indeed redundant, as both Şerif Mardin in his study mentioned above and Şükran Vahide (1992; 2003; 2005)[7] have written extensively, and with startlingly different approaches, comprehensive accounts of his history. Camilla Nereid (1997) also offers a review of Nursi's life in a briefer fashion, a study which contributes to the already extant literature mainly in her careful attention to the reliability and limitation of various sources.[8] Finally, Fred A. Reed (1999) presents Nursi's life and times in a personal and informal manner in the shape of what must be labeled a travel journal, his trekking route largely following that of Nursi's life events.

Nonetheless an overview of some of the fundamental themes emerging from Nursi's life, his historical context and his writings must be considered as they are integral to the development of the movement and to its current identity. Living as he did from 1877-1960, Nursi's life spanned the post-*Tanzimat* period of the Ottoman Empire, its subsequent fall, the corresponding birth of the Turkish Republic in 1923, the decades of secular nation-making which followed, and the rise of multi-party politics in Turkey. He died in March of 1960, just months before the first military coup. Even in death he continued to be affected by the events taking place in Turkey as his bones were unearthed less than two months after burial on the orders of the military and re-interred in a grave of undisclosed location (Vahide, 2003, "Chronology": xxiv). His era was, needless to say, an age filled with change, conflict and hope. Four of the themes which come to the fore during these turbulent times are of direct relevance to this study: the changing face of politics, the need to balance modern scientific learning with religious education, the advent of nationalism and its relationship to religion, and the ever-encroaching influence of the West. A scan of the events of Bediüzzaman's life in relation to each of these four themes and his personal attitude towards them as embodied in his writings will

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[7] Please note that Şükran Vahide changed her name after her conversion to Islam. Some of her works may also be found under her former name, Mary or Meryem Weld.

[8] One of the sources about which Nereid cautions is Vahide's work. Given that Vahide was converted to Islam largely as a result of the *Risale-i Nur*, Nereid finds her work to be more akin to a heroic narrative or hagiography than an objective presentation of the "bare facts" (Nereid, 1997: 12-13).

provide the necessary underpinning to accurately approach the contemporary *Nur* movement.

2.2.1 The 'Mace' of Politics[9]

Perhaps most surprising is Nursi's personal history of political involvement. Given that many modern followers of Nursi consider distance from politics one of the defining traits of the movement (though this is by no means universal), it is remarkable to find that the divisions Nursi himself made regarding the major phases of his life, i.e. the "Old Said," the "New Said" and the "Third Said" periods, are largely dependent upon his engagement in politics; in one respect, politics could be said to have compartmentalized his life. The Old Said period extended from Nursi's youth to the early 1920s, the first 45 years of his life. During this time Nursi's involvement in politics flourished, especially leading up to and following the Young Turk Revolution of 1908. Arriving in Istanbul in 1907 with the intent of drumming up support for his university project in the East, Nursi was caught up in the political wave of constitutionalism then washing over the country. With the installation of the second constitution in 1908, Nursi expressed his support for "freedom and constitutionalism," which he perceived to be consistent with the principles of Islam, through speeches, newspaper articles and involvement in public life. Though still motivated on the whole by his vision for educational reform, to be discussed below, Nursi persisted in incorporating his political views and approval of constitutionalism into his speeches and teachings as he traveled throughout the Eastern provinces in the summer of 1910. Constitutionalism was to be, he felt, "the basis of the progress and unity of the Islamic world" (Vahide, 2003, "Chronology: xviii). Nursi continued to express political opinions as the world transformed with the end of World War I, bringing with it the struggle for Turkish independence. He supported through his writings the national independence effort in Anatolia and, on a related political front, expressed his opposition to the Kurdish-Armenian agreement regarding an autonomous Kurdistan with newspaper articles written in 1920, an

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[9] Nursi, in his "New Said" period when he had withdrawn from political involvement, refers to politics as a 'mace' which he threw away and now he holds in its place the light of truth (Nursi, 1998: 234).

opinion carrying particular weight as he himself was of Kurdish origin (Vahide, 2003, "Chronology": xix).

It is at the point of the birth of the Turkish Republic that a gradual though dramatic transformation takes place in Nursi, carrying him from the Old Said to the New Said period. Though there were certainly other ramifications of this transformation, including alterations in his views regarding philosophy and the centrality of the Qur'an, one of the most notable changes is Nursi's withdrawal from politics and public life. In the fall of 1922, responding to invitations from Ankara, Nursi traveled to the new governmental hub. He was disheartened to find there an overwhelming sway toward secularism and Westernization. Despite being given an official welcoming ceremony by the National Assembly in November of 1922 and being offered various positions by Mustafa Kemal, Nursi could not be persuaded to join in this new political current and reportedly responded to Kemal's proposals for governmental appointments by saying, "The New Said wants to work for the next world and cannot work with you. But he won't interfere with you either" (Vahide, 2005: 17).

Returning to the East, Bediüzzaman withdrew into seclusion with a few of his students and wasn't to enter into the political scene again as an actor for about 30 years. M. Sait Özervarlı identifies the new goal of Nursi during this period as that of defending the Islamic faith: "As opposed to the earlier period of his life, he had no desire at this point to deal with political questions or activities, but sought instead to strengthen the religious feelings and Islamic identity of the people" (Özervarlı, 2003: 319). This did not mean he had no interaction with the government, for the state often found he and his followers threatening and they were imprisoned or exiled accordingly. Indeed, Nursi spent the majority of this period of his life under some form of surveillance, be it in jail or under house arrest. Following one such arrest in Eskişehir in 1935, Nursi emphasized again his detachment from politics, telling the court, "Light has been given me, the club of politics has not been given me" (Vahide, 2005: 25). Indeed, at the time of the 1935 trial he had not even read a newspaper in close to 13 years, which corresponds roughly with his retreat from Ankara in 1923, perceiving newspapers to be "the tongue of politics" (Vahide, 2005: 25). His withdrawal was total.

The late 1940s brought about changes in the political situation in Turkey as multi-party politics were instituted and the 1950 election saw the defeat of the Republican People's Party (RPP) and the rise of the Demokrat party. With these changes, a Third Said emerged and with it yet another distinct approach to politics. Seeing some hope in the new Demokrat Party's sympathy toward Islam, Nursi mounted the horse of politics once again, offering support for the Party and hailing Adnan Menderes, the party's leader, as "a hero of Islam" (Vahide, 2005: 33). That a different Said surfaced at this time is unquestionable, though the extent to which he engaged in politics seems to be a matter of some debate. Şükran Vahide sees Nursi's support of the Demokrat Party to be, "limited to offering them advice and guidance, and urging them to take measures that would strengthen religion and to renew relations with the Islamic world" (Vahide, 2005: 33). Indeed, she alludes to a passage from one of Nursi's own writings, *Emirdağ Lahikasi*, which refers to the Demokrat Party as "the lesser of two evils." Şerif Mardin, on the other hand, sees the Third Said in a somewhat different light. While he concedes that Nursi's personal involvement was limited, he argues that Nursi, in 1956, "announced that it was incumbent upon his followers to support the new Demokrat Party" (Mardin, 1989: 98). Mardin proceeds to give an example of Nursi's newfound political activism by citing how, in 1957, Nursi encouraged his followers to vote for a specific candidate, Dr. Tahsin Tola, a man who would later edit Bediüzzaman's authorized biography. Camilla Nereid further bolsters Mardin's view of Nursi as one who actively spurred his followers on to participate in politics with the story of Hamza Emek, a student of the *Risale-i Nur* in the 1940s and 1950s. Emek states, "One day the Master came to me and asked me to enroll as a Democratic Party member on behalf of him and the *Risale-i Nur*. Later I was asked by the local party organization to be their president. […] [Nursi] advised me to accept the position and so I did" (Nereid, 1997: 14). Nursi's degree of involvement, whether extremely limited or more active as an advocate for the Demokrat Party, is not so important, in the end, as the fact that such involvement existed at all, thus comprising a third approach to politics in his lifetime.

The manner in which these three phases of Nursi's attitude toward politics has impacted the identity of the modern *Nur* movement and its adherents is a topic

for consideration when interpreting the results of the interviews in Chapter Four and Chapter Five. At this time, it is sufficient to note that through the course of his life Nursi's thoughts on politics, as evidenced by both words and actions, were not static but dynamic and variable.

2.2.2 Nursi and Education

The second major theme which emerges from Nursi's life is an emphasis on education. The very title Bediüzzaman, by which Said Nursi is still often referred, is indicative of his attachment to and affiliation with education. The title, which means, "the Wonder of the Age," was bestowed upon him by one of his teachers, Molla Fethullah Efendi, at an early age to honor Nursi's intelligence and his ability to memorize books (Nereid, 1997: 14). All evidence suggests that he was worthy of the title. Indeed Şükran Vahide's account of Nursi's early academic achievements[10] seems so extraordinary as to give one leave to question their validity. She cites how Nursi completed in six months a course of study which normally required fifteen to twenty years. By fourteen or fifteen years of age he had earned the right to wear the turban and gown of a scholar, though he apparently rejected this honor out of humility. Following that time he spent two years in Bitlis where he committed to memory forty basic works on logic, the Arabic sciences, Qur'anic exegesis, Hadith, *fiqh*, and theology.

Nursi would later take up the study of the modern sciences during a stay at the Governor's house in Van, a period of study and social interaction which would shape his life ambitions. Not only was Nursi given the opportunity to learn the secular sciences, but he was also in contact with officials in the governor's mansion; these two factors radically transformed his ideas regarding education. He came to the conclusion that, "the classical arguments which he had encountered to refute the doubts of unbelievers (i.e. the Westernized *Tanzimat* intellectuals) were worthless and that a study of secular sciences (*funûn*) was necessary to refurbish these arguments" (Mardin, 1989: 76-77). Thus arose his distinct vision for educational reform, the combination of Islamic education and modern science.

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[10] The information regarding Nursi's personal educational history and his ideas regarding education itself, unless otherwise indicated, are drawn from the following source: Vahide (2005).

Nursi first instituted this combination of modern and religious sciences in his own *medrese*, the Horhor Medrese, located in Van, where he sometimes taught up to sixty students. He sought to further extend the benefits of such an educational system by establishing an Islamic university in the East of Turkey which would incorporate his reformed pedagogical approach. The foundation of this university, to be named Medrestü'z-Zehrâ, was to become for Nursi one of the principle goals of his life. Indeed, he referred to it in *Emirdağ Lahikası* as "the most important matter" of his biography. It was this pursuit which would take him to Istanbul and to an audience with Sultan Abdülhamid II in 1907. From this period we can glean insight into the basic ideas associated with Nursi's educational reform. Not only did Nursi advocate the reconciling of religious studies (including both the traditional *medrese* education and the *tekke* education of the Sufis) and modern sciences, but he also felt strongly that students should be able to specialize in an area for which they had a particular aptitude, which constituted a significant departure from the traditional method of education. He also spoke harshly against "scholastic despotism" and called for the "'democratization' of education." Though his initial attempts to found a university were unsuccessful, Nursi would secure the necessary funds from the succeeding sultan, Sultan Reşad. The foundations of his university were laid but with the outbreak of WWI construction ceased and Nursi, along with many of his students, went to war against Russian and Armenian forces. He was again to receive funding after the war, as the deputies in the National Assembly in Ankara in the early 1920s designated money for the project, but because of the circumstances of the day and the press for the elimination of Islam from public life, these funds, too, were to no avail. Furthermore, Nursi himself was in the midst of a transition from the "Old Said" to the "New Said" and was thus shortly to withdraw into solitude.

The transformation into the "New Said" did not only involve a retreat from politics, as discussed previously, but also a renewed commitment to the Qur'an as that which should be at the center of his life and writings. He began to see the sway which secular philosophy had held over him and the effects of such an influence. Mardin explains it thus:

> The starting point of his spiritual voyage was the discovery that he had been captivated by the philosophical sciences (*Ulûm-u Felsefe*) and had given them weight equal to that of religion (*Ulûm-u İslamiye*). These philosophical sciences had muddied his soul and become an obstacle to his moral progress. The pessimism that philosophy generated resulted in his soul being 'strangled' by the Universe. (Mardin, 1989: 92)

Thus this period of the "New Said" constituted both a shift away from teaching and towards writing which was in keeping with his new emphasis on withdrawal and solitude, and also a modification on his combination of religious and modern education to exclude materialist philosophy. Indeed, this conviction in favor of modern sciences but opposed to secular philosophy continues to influence some of his followers today.

Though his method of educating altered at this time, Nursi continued to emphasize reformed (i.e. combined) education throughout his life and to his students and followers. As Camilla Nereid asserts, "Said Nursi stressed the importance of education, both as a way to fully grasp the universal meaning of the sacred books and as a means to acquire the technology and science of the twentieth century" (Nereid, 1997: 44). The prominence of education in Nursi's life and thought, it could be argued, is one of the most defining factors of the *Nur* movement's development. *Nur* schools have been opened throughout the country, which focus not only on religious education but also give students a quality education in the modern sciences. Furthermore, the method of study Nursi encouraged, as Dale F. Eickelman notes, included "the importance of direct contact with texts" and "exploring multiple combinations of knowledge, including those outside the Islamic tradition" (Eickelman, 2003: 54). Such an approach largely determines not only the *Nur* adherents' own religious disciplines but also the way in which they relate to one another as a community, often gathering for a discussion (*sohbet*) which centers on Nursi's *Risale-i Nur* and its interpretation.

2.2.3 Nursi and Nationalism

A third theme which surfaces in light of both Nursi's writings and the current *Nur* movement is that of nationalism. Three different matters arise when taking up the issue of Nursi and nationalism: Nursi's interaction with Kurdish nationalism, his

thoughts on nationalism in general, and his interaction with Turkish nationalism. Though the first is of less direct relevance to this study, as I did not have the opportunity to interview any Kurdish followers of Nursi, it is a lively topic in some circles of the *Nur* movement and thus should briefly be addressed. The second and third matters, on the other hand, are of vital importance with regard to the interviews conducted for this study because they continue to influence the feelings Nursi's followers have toward nationalism today, and thereby shape their identity both as individuals and as a group in important ways.

Nursi has been claimed by some and accused by others of being a Kurdish nationalist. Indeed, within the *Nur* movement itself there is a group who centers its understanding of Nursi around his ethnicity. M. Hakan Yavuz describes this group and their views:

> A group of Kurdish Nurcus formed their own organization, the Med-Zehra community. […] The Kurdish Nurcus tend to treat Nursi as a Kurdish nationalist, whereas the Turks stress his pan-Islamism. Many Kurdish nationalists interpret Nursi's exile and persecution as the example of the persecution of the Kurdish identity. (Yavuz, 2003, "*Nur* Study Circles": 311-312)

When looking solely at the historical events of his life, Nursi's approach to Kurdish nationalism seems to be largely a matter of interpretation. For example, Nursi supposedly encouraged Kurdish separatism among those in the Diyarbakır region in a speech he made in 1910. Later, Nursi was arrested for his apparent participation in the Shaykh Said Rebellion of eastern Anatolia which began in February of 1925; this rebellion is claimed by some to have been motivated by Kurdish nationalistic aims.[11] However, both of these accounts of alleged support or involvement in the Kurdish cause have been called into question.

Şerif Mardin takes up the matter of Nursi as a Kurdish nationalist, arguing that Nursi should not be considered as such despite occasional appearances to the

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[11] Robert Olson is foremost among scholars who argue that the nationalist motivations in the Shaykh Said Rebellion were more compelling than the religious ones and that this rebellion constituted a significant development in Kurdish and Turkish nationalism. For a brief review of various perspectives on the religious versus the nationalist nature of the Shaykh Said rebellion see Olson (2000). See also his book on the subject, The Emergence of Kurdish Nationalism and the Sheikh Said Rebellion: 1880-1925, (Olson, 1989).

contrary.[12] For example, Mardin provides an alternate interpretation of Nursi's supposed encouragement of Kurdish separatism in 1910:

> There is nothing in these sources to justify the later accusation leveled against him by most of his modern Turkish critics that he was a Kurdish nationalist. It is true that by 1910 his message to the inhabitants of the Diyarbakır region was that they should be in control of the region. In the perspective of Said's later career it is fair to evaluate this attitude as that of an 'Ottoman' demanding cultural and administrative autonomy. Before the Turkish Republic this attitude would not have been misunderstood by many Ottoman officials, who saw the Empire as a *consociation* of ethnic groups. (Mardin, 1989: 86)

Like Mardin, Şükran Vahide likewise maintains that Nursi's supposed Kurdish nationalist tendencies are misunderstood. Considering Nursi's arrest with reference to the Shakyh Said rebellion in 1925, she argues that despite various pleas from leaders of the revolt, and even a letter from Shaykh Said himself, Nursi refused to be involved (Vahide, 2005: 18). Indeed, in another article she claims that his arrest and deportation in the matter were simply a "part of the government's plans for the elimination of the ulama's influence, and even of Islam itself" (Vahide, 2003, "Intellectual Biography": 12). She further asserts that the revolt was not nationalistic in nature but was "a revolt against the abolition of the Caliphate and ensuing secularist measures" (Vahide, 2005: 18), i.e. that the revolt's main motivation was religious.

Thus Nursi's identity as a Kurdish nationalist, though debatable according to some, seems to have been dismissed as untenable by two of the major scholars who have worked on his biography.[13] And while the historical events themselves, such as his statements in 1910 and his arrest in 1925, may leave room for interpretation, a review of Nursi's writings would seem to lend further support to Vahide's and

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[12] Mardin does concede to Nursi's aiding the Kurdish autonomists in Istanbul immediately following the 1908 Young Turk coup (60), but we can assume that the argument above would apply in a similar fashion. Mardin also argues against Nursi's Kurdish nationalism in regard to his supposed involvement in a Society for the Promotion of Kurds (90).

[13] Paul Dumont (1986) argues that both Nursi's arrest in affiliation with the revolt of 1925 and some of his writings, particularly those from the 1908-1909 period, would indicate that "Nursi was not totally indifferent to Kurdish nationalism" (42). He further criticizes the 'official' biographies for not fully addressing this subject. Dumont references Faruk Güventürk as further supporting the linkages between Nursi and Kurdish nationalism in his book Din Işığı Altında *Nur*culuğun İçyüzü (Güventürk, 1964).

Mardin's analysis. It is to an appraisal of Nursi's attitudes regarding nationalism in general as expressed in these writings that we now turn.

In his Twenty-Sixth Letter in the *Risale-i Nur* Collection, Nursi states quite clearly the dangers he finds inherent in nationalist thinking:

> Nationalism or ethnic differences have been given great momentum in this century. It is particularly the intriguing mischief-makers of Europe who excite nationalist feelings among Muslim communities in order to divide them up and swallow them up one by one. […] [T]he national conflict between Muslim peoples means to help the Western enemies. (Nursi, 1995: 136, 138)

Beyond the potential for the weakening of Muslims vis-à-vis Western powers, nationalism is also, in Nursi's conception, far inferior to the unity afforded by Islam. In the same letter he argues, "[H]owever strong a nationalist brotherhood is, it can only be as strong as a single aspect of the Islamic brotherhood, so to substitute it for the Islamic brotherhood is as foolish an act as replacing the diamonds in a citadel with some stones in that citadel" (Nursi, 1995: 138). Thus nationalism's appeal, according to Nursi, is tempered on these two accounts.

However, the seeming dismissal of nationalism in the two passages above is not Nursi's final word on the subject.   It is debatable whether or not Nursi leaves open the possibility of nationalism being appropriate in some respects given that Nursi also writes about nationalism as being of two "kinds," one positive and one negative:

> But there are two kinds of nationalism: one negative, ominous, harmful, which is fed through swallowing up others and sustained through enmity against others. […] The other kind of nationalism is that which is positive and, arising from the intrinsic requirements of social life, brings about mutual assistance and solidarity, produces a beneficial power and causes the Islamic brotherhood to be stronger. (Nursi, 1995: 136-138)

Thus it would seem that Nursi does in fact endorse one form of nationalism.[14] Does this indicate, then, that students of the *Risale-i Nur* can express and participate in

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[14] This acceptance of nationalism is in keeping with Gökhan Çetinsaya's argument in which he groups Nursi with Mehmet Ali Ayni and Sait Halim Paşa, two other Islamists, and asserts that all three of them were among those who no longer objected to the idea of nationalism in their writings. As Çetinsaya (1999) explains, "They were aware of the fact that in the age of Western imperialism, religion and nationalism could and even should strengthen each other. They again distinguished two types of Turkism: negative (pure Turkists) and positive (moderate Turkists), but this time wholeheartedly supported the 'positive Turkists.' (360). He later cites Nursi as having written that,

nationalist fervor, either Kurdish or Turkish, provided that it is of the positive kind? Though Nursi undoubtedly had qualms about the potential divisiveness and the inferior strength of nationalism, did he completely reject it?

Camilla Nereid believes that he did. To support her position in light of the above quotation she takes issue with the concept of two "kinds" (*kısım*) of nationalism, arguing that a more proper translation of the word would be "part" or "component." She therefore asserts that what Nursi actually intended to say was that there are two aspects of nationalism, positive and negative, and that these two are inextricably intertwined. Because the positive part of nationalism must always be accompanied by the negative part, she thus concludes, "This led Said Nursi to reject nationalism, be it Kurdish or Turkish" (Nereid, 1997: 100-101). She proves this assertion throughout her study by comparing the historical treatment of two different Islamic groups, the Nakşibendis and the *Nur* movement, by the State. She argues that had the secular State's primary concern been with the religious nature of these groups, their treatment of the two should have been similar. Historically, however, that has not been the case, as the Nakşibendis experienced a much closer and more serene relationship with the State, while the *Nur* movement encountered resistance. Thus it logically follows that the religious aspect of the two groups is not the determining variable in the treatment received by the State.

This deduction of Nereid's is quite intriguing, as Nursi himself attributed his difficulties with the state to religious grounds. In a letter he wrote from exile in Barla, where he stayed from 1926-1934, he accredits this unjust treatment to his Islamic devotion:

> The misguided, worldly people do not put me to so much trouble because they think that I am engaged in politics. The reason why they afflict me with such suffering on behalf of the committee of irreligious people, whether consciously or unconsciously, is that I am devoted to the religion of Islam. (Nursi, 1998: 60)

"The idea of nationalism in this age so progressed that one cannot say, 'abandon the idea of nationalism' to those who were interested in social life" (361). One must therefore assume that Çetinsaya would not agree with the following argument by Nereid.

Indeed, it would seem a plausible explanation given the growing tension between secularism and religion at that time. Nereid, however, finds the determining variable in Nursi's relations with the state to be nationalism, not religion:

> The *Nur* movement and the Nakşibendis differed in one major aspect in their relation to the state establishment: in their views on and attitudes towards Turkish nationalism, the basis for the state's legitimacy. While the Nakşibendis contributed to the rise of Turkish nationalism, Said Nursi refused the idea outright. In his opinion Islam was both incompatible with and superior to nationalism. (Nereid, 1997: 88)

The conclusion that a rejection of Turkish nationalism has historically defined the relations between the *Nur* movement and the State[15] is engaging and proved to be of great significance in interpreting the interviews conducted for this thesis. It highlights not only the need to ascertain contemporary *Nur* movement perspectives on nationalism in general and on Turkish nationalism specifically, but also to consider the *Nur* movement's assessment of their relationship with the State and the determining variables behind it. Both of these issues will be considered in the interview section of this study.

2.2.4 Nursi and the West

Though Nursi's life afforded him little direct exposure to Western civilization, he perceived the encroachment of the West upon his own culture and unabashedly expressed his opinions regarding it. One of the earliest anecdotes which reveals his reaction to the Western intrusion is dated around the turn of the

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[15] Upon her initial reading of this study Elisabeth Özdalga very appropriately questioned whether the rejection of nationalism might not also work in the *Nur* movement's favor given that this would also embody a rejection of Kurdish nationalism, which should be a positive thing in the eyes of the State. Indeed, this is an interesting question as Nereid herself identifies that some Nakşibendis were in fact supporters of Kurdish nationalism (85), which, one would assume from today's context, should have worked against them, i.e. considering their respective stances toward Kurdish and Turkish nationalism, the *Nur* movement and the Nakşibendis should have landed on approximately equal footing in the eyes of the State. I think Özdalga's proffered explanation, namely that Kurdish nationalism was so far from any frame of reference at that point that the question is "out of context," is an insightful one. I would further offer that this tension between the *Nur* movement and the State was most probably not the result of a thoroughly-considered policy which would weigh the advantages of an anti-Kurdish nationalism stance with the disadvantages of an anti-Turkish nationalism one. Rather, while antagonism to nationalism may have been the determining variable, it was not an identified or defined one. The State was responding to a perceived threat and therefore reacted strongly against Nursi's rejection of nationalism without encouraging its "positive" aspects. This may also indicate that, for the State, the endorsement of Turkish nationalism was far more crucial than rejection of Kurdish nationalism.

nineteenth century while he was staying at the governor's mansion in Van. Mardin records the story as follows:

> Newspapers were regularly received in the office of the governor, and it is in a news dispatch from London that Said Nursi states he received the first great shock that urged him to adopt a crusading spirit in the cause of Islam. The date was 1895. A fracas with Armenians in Istanbul had aggravated the Armenian problem. Europe was in arms against the Muslim Ottoman 'barbarians.' The British secretary of the colonies had made a speech stating that Muslims never would become civilized unless the *Qur'ān* was wrested away from them. Said Nursi reacted violently, pledging to show the world that the *Qur'ān* was 'unextinguishable.' (Mardin, 1989: 78)

Though certainly aware of Western civilization prior to this incident, this proved to be a turning point in Nursi's passion for the Koran[16] and, one must assume, a foundational moment in his perception of the West.

It is likely that his understanding of Western culture was further shaped by a short period spent in Europe following his escape from imprisonment after being captured during WWI and detained for more than two years in Russia. He fled through Warsaw and Vienna on his return to Turkey, and later added that he also took a trip to Switzerland during this time "to study how people of different religious and ethnic stock had been able to make up a modern state" (Mardin, 1989: 89).[17] Beyond this mention of study in Switzerland, however, we know little about this interlude in the West and the impact that it may have had upon his regard, or disregard, for Western civilization.

Though his direct interaction with the West may have been limited, Nursi's view of the West is clear and this continues to be a weighty consideration for

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[16] Şükran Vahide likewise records this event and describes the effect upon Nursi as quite dramatic: "He was severely shaken and experienced a complete turnabout in his ideas. He realized that he should make all the sciences and knowledge he had acquired a means to understand the Qur'an and prove its truths, and that 'the Qur'an alone should be his aim, the purpose of his learning, and the object of his life'" (Vahide, 2005: 8-9).

[17] It is important to note here that this time in Europe, including his apparent study in Switzerland, occurred during the "Old Said" period of Nursi's life. Thus, while this statement could rightly be interpreted as reflecting an interest in the national question, and thus conflict with the previous arguments regarding Nursi's rejection of nationalism, I think this statement should be overlooked with regard to nationalism given both the time in his life when this took place and the fact that we hear virtually nothing of it afterwards. We can conclude that, though this may have reflected a brief interest in nationalism during the Old Said period, it was not representative of the attitudes toward nationalism of the New and Third Said periods, was not, therefore, present in the *Risale-i Nur*, and thus does not strongly affect the attitudes of contemporary Nur students.

students of the *Risale-i Nur* today as the question of Western civilization and their interaction with it clangs ever more loudly. Given its relevance, therefore, a brief survey of Nursi's opinions of the West as derived from his writings is deemed appropriate. This will also serve as a reference point to determine, based on the interviews, whether Nursi's attitude toward the West provides a template for his followers to process and judge the various Western influences abounding in their culture today. Indeed, as Chapters Four and Five will reveal, learning from Nursi how to respond to the modern world seems to be an important contribution to his followers' lives. The question then arises: does this also indicate that his attitudes guide their responses to the West?

Patrice C. Brodeur (2005) conducted a study of Nursi's conception of the West by considering his references to Europe[18] in the *Risale-i Nur* collection. Of the 47 times she discovered Europe to be mentioned in the work as a whole, she situated each reference into one of three broad categories: those being employed for strictly geographical purposes, those which indicate a 'positive' Europe, and the overwhelming majority which discuss Europe in a 'negative' light. Brodeur further expounds on this categorization by defending her use of the terms 'positive' and 'negative' because of the "dichotomous and often moralistic" manner in which Nursi approaches European civilization. Indeed, in light of Nursi's own writings, these binary categorizations need no justification, as it is apparent that he himself saw Europe as both positive and negative, good in some respects and bad in others. Nursi states:

> It should not be misunderstood; Europe is two. One follows the sciences, which serve justice and right and the industries beneficial for the life of society through the inspiration it has received from true Christianity; this first Europe I am not addressing. I am rather addressing the second corrupt Europe, which, through the darkness of the philosophy of Naturalism, supposing the evils of civilization to be its virtues, has driven mankind to vice and misguidance. (Brodeur, 2005: 92)

It is thus through this separation of Europe, and thereby of Western civilization, into two distinct and fundamentally different parts that Nursi could be said to counsel his followers in their response to the West. They are not to reject it outright, as the

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[18] The equating of Nursi's opinion of Europe with that of Western civilization as a whole is suitable given the time period in which he lived, a time when Europe represented the whole of the West.

constructive elements which "serve justice, right and the industries beneficial for the life of society" can and should be incorporated into their own lives. However, they must be alert because there is a corrupt version of this Western mode which leads to "vice and misguidance." They are, therefore, to take that which is valuable and discard that which is detrimental.

Necati Aydın (2005) superimposes Nursi's perception of the West onto contemporary discourse by considering Nursi's thought in light of the current debate regarding the clash of civilizations. Aydın asserts that within Nursi's writing we see a struggle to embrace virtue and abjure decadence and this same straining can be identified in Nursi's attitude toward Western civilization. Aydın rebuffs, however, the idea that this struggle is in any way equivalent to the notion of civilizations clashing, seeing Nursi as one who rejects this view: "Bediüzzaman accepts the struggle between decadent civilization and virtuous civilization, but he firmly rejects the inevitable clash between the civilizations of east and west predicted by Huntington. He proposes co-operation with the part of Western civilization that has sprung from Christianity and whose aim is virtue, against decadent civilization and irreligion" (Aydın, 2005: 171). Aydın's observation is not only significant in that it places Nursi firmly in the moderate/tolerant camp, a position which is highly touted among academics and lay people alike. But it is perhaps even more enlightening because it demonstrates the ability to apply Nursi's ideas regarding Western civilization to the present situation. This is crucial as many of the interviewees find themselves sorely in need of a way by which to navigate current realities in a devout Muslim fashion. The extent to which Nursi functions as such a compass for the Nur students with regard to the influences of the West will be considered in further detail in Chapter Five.

2.3 The Nur Movement after Nursi

Before addressing the history and development of the *Nur* movement in the post-Nursi era, we should begin with a few cautionary notes. Taking up the topic of the *Nur* "movement" requires that one proceed with some delicacy. I was admonished by one interviewee not to refer to it as a "movement" at all, though it is the term used throughout the social science literature, because movement implies

something formal and something which could be construed as forbidden.[19] Not only is the terminology troublesome, but identifying who is a part of the movement is also problematic. Şerif Mardin comments on the ambiguous nature of the movement's boundaries:

> The social characteristics of its earliest following, just as those of its present votaries, are difficult to pinpoint. Since it does not operate on the model of a traditional Islamic sect, but claims it is a medium for the dissemination of the truth of the *Qur'ān*, its boundaries are diffuse: every person who joins in the task of dissemination is *ipso facto* a disciple. There are no initiation rites and there is no formal organizational structure; a precise count of the membership is, thus, impossible. (Mardin, 1989: 25-26)

The nebulous character of the movement must be kept in sight as any assertions about the movement as a whole are made by scholars and followers alike. Not that this should inhibit scholarly consideration of the group, but it should be remembered that there are many who would identify themselves as followers of Nursi whose voices have not been taken into account.

One last qualification regarding this final section must be made before proceeding. The choice I have made to take up this survey of the movement after the death of Nursi could be seen by some as an arbitrary decision. One crucial and oft-reinforced aspect of the *Nur* movement is that it is one of a book, not a person. While the followers of Nursi certainly possess a very high opinion of him, one might even refer to their view of him as exaltation (though this term was rejected out of hand by one of my interviewees) the focus of the movement itself is not to be Nursi at all, but the *Risale-i Nur*. Thus, the date of Nursi's death, while obviously significant, it could be argued is not central to the development of the movement as such. In accordance with this, many of the shifts which have occurred in the movement and mark its character today actually began before Nursi's death, implying it was not his death but other factors which more extensively molded the movement. Mardin, for example, identifies one of the movement's major shifts. He asserts that while the central role of the Qur'an has been maintained, the movement

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[19] I will continue to use the term both for lack of a better one and in order to place this study within the context of other studies of the same general topic. I do not, however, do this in some attempt to insist that Nursi's followers are more organized or formal than they claim to be. I agree that movement in its strictest definition may not be the appropriate term but neither the interviewee nor I were able to invent a different one. Furthermore, none of the other interviewees expressed concern regarding this term, even when asked directly if it was appropriate.

nonetheless concentrates more intently on "social and political organization, cultural integrity, psychological balance and flexible inter-personal relations" (Mardin, 1989: 38). This change in emphasis he dates back to the 1950s, a full decade before Nursi's death. Thus throughout the ensuing review of the movement since 1960 one must bear in mind that not only did the essential core of the movement remain constant in the form of the *Risale-i Nur* but also that much of what characterizes the movement had already been determined prior to that date.

Two scholars who address the development of the *Nur* movement after Nursi's death, Metin Karabaşoğlu and M. Hakan Yavuz, take different approaches to their historical reviews but nonetheless arrive at the same defining conclusion: over the last forty odd years the movement has been most notably marked by division. Karabaşoğlu (2003) adopts a chronological method, looking at the major developments in the movement decade by decade. Yavuz (2003, "*Nur* Study Circles"), on the other hand, tackles the movement's developments from a thematic perspective, identifying those sources which contributed most to its fragmentation.

From Karabaşoğlu we learn that the 1970s was perhaps the most crucial decade in the development and segregation of the *Nur* movement. He gives three primary reasons for this decade's overwhelming influence: the rise of political Islam, the institutionalization of the community which brought about centralization and the loss of unity within the community. The last two factors in particular are the result of the undermining of the pluralistic foundation of the text-based community. Once this sense of pluralism and openness to interpretation was lost, division followed as a means to eliminate the tension of various and sometimes opposing textual readings. Indeed, for Karabaşoğlu it is the lack of tolerance for differences in interpretation which constitutes the most important problem for the *Nur* movement over the last four decades:

> The existence of diverse opinions is an inherent consequence of the movement being text-based. However, the conflict implied in the diversity of opinion has led to the birth of an authoritative interpretation of the *Risale*. Ironically, the attitude of 'one text, one interpretation' has given rise to different groups, each claiming to hold the authoritative interpretation. These groups have become subject to divisions within themselves, again, due to the intolerance of the differences of interpretation. (Karabaşoğlu, 2003: 287)

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Karabaşoğlu sees the 1980s, then, as a time when the movement was responding to and dealing with the multitude of divisions which occurred the decade before. It is in this context that he understands the rise of Fethullah Gülen, whose group is alternatively included and excluded from the *Nur* movement. The 1990s received a more positive review as a time when the *Nur* movement advanced outside of Turkey due both to translations of the *Risale-i Nur* and to the international symposiums which began at this time. Karabaşoğlu concludes that the future of the movement depends upon the ability of the various groups encompassed under the *Nur* umbrella to "build bridges" and thereby "put a stop to further division" (Karabaşoğlu, 2003: 288).

M. Hakan Yavuz's understanding of the last forty years in some ways coincides with Karabaşoğlu's, most significantly with regard to the impact of divergent textual interpretations on the group's fragmentation. Yavuz considers this specifically in light of two sects within the movement, the Yazıcılar (the writers) and the Neşriyatçılar (the publishers). The first of the two wanted to maintain the practice of copying the *Risale-i Nur* in handwritten form while the second felt that for the purposes of mass and rapid distribution publication was necessary. This conflict constitutes a disagreement both with regard to the meaning and the treatment of the text. Given that both scholars see the issues surrounding the text as central to the movement's development, then, it is safe to assert that the most definitive source of division has been the flexibility inherent in a text-based, as opposed to a leader-based, group.

Yavuz also corresponds with Karabaşoğlu in seeing politics as another central reason for the division of the movement. However while Karabaşoğlu focuses on the 1970s and particularly on the rise of political Islam through such parties as the National Order Party (NOP) and the National Salvation Party (NSP), Yavuz sees the moment of divergence within the movement as occurring after the 1980 coup when some like Mehmet Kırkıncı and Fethullah Gülen endorsed the military coup and adopted what he terms a "Turkish nationalist view of Islam" (Yavuz, 2003, "*Nur* Study Circles": 310). Thus, unsurprisingly given the fluid nature of Nursi's own opinion regarding politics as discussed above, involvement or

lack of involvement in the political arena is another sphere in which rifts have arisen within the movement.

Yavuz further brings to our attention a third element, one that Karabaşoğlu does not address, which Yavuz claims further exacerbated the movement's splitting, the ethnic composition of the *Nur* community. There are those, as discussed previously in the section on Nursi and nationalism, who choose to focus on Nursi's Kurdish ethnicity and identify this as one of the essential aspects of the movement while others reject this ethnic categorization. This, according to Yavuz is the third prong, along with textual disagreements and opinions about politics, which resulted in the current, disjointed state of the movement.

For the purposes of this study not only is the question of how the divisions came about important, as it is enlightening to consider how these conflicts are still playing out in the movement today, but so is the recognition that the splintering which took place in the post-Nursi era is principally the consequence of trying to define what exactly constitutes the identity of the movement, be it in the area of textual interpretation, politics or ethnicity. Thus, the study which follows gains further relevance in ascertaining that which constitutes the *Nur* movement according to contemporary adherents. It is in light of the preceding foundation of Nursi's historical background, his ideas and the development of the movement that the interviews with adherents will be interpreted and evaluated in Chapters Four and Five.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

In proposing a study of identity, one must take care to define the assumptions and connotations which lie behind such a term because it is, in and of itself, broad and ambiguous. As many scholars have noted, identity, in its simplest form, may be defined as both similarity and difference.[20] This duality of meaning, along with the many different ways and contexts in which the term is employed, thereby necessitates a brief explanation of how identity is understood with reference to the study at hand. Even having limited the definition of identity, however, a plethora of possible research questions remain; these, too, must be narrowed in order to comprise a stringent thesis. Thus, the ensuing discussion of the concept of identity here employed will be followed by an overview of the basic problematic of this thesis and the theoretical foundations upon which said problematic will be addressed. To conclude, a brief accounting of the subjective nature of this study, and the corresponding partialities that may result, will be considered in regard both to those interviewed and to my own potential biases as an interviewer.

3.1 Identity: A Definition

In defining and delimiting identity, this study will draw heavily from Thomas Hylland Eriksen's book Ethnicity and Nationalism: Anthropological Perspectives, particularly focusing on many of the concepts of Fredrik Barth represented therein. While Eriksen's is admittedly a study of ethnic and nationalist groups and not of religious groups like the *Nur* movement, use of such a theoretical framework is justified on a number of accounts. First and foremost, the basic

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[20] Elisabeth Özdalga notes this duality of meaning in an unpublished paper entitled "Identity" by citing Anita Jacobson-Widding's observation that identity refers to both sameness and distinctiveness. Richard Jenkins (1996) likewise identifies this double definition in his book *Social Identity*.

questions asked with regard to these ethnic and nationalist groups are the same basic questions which comprise the core of this thesis, namely an exploration of "the ways in which ethnic relations are being defined and perceived by people; how they talk and think about their own group as well as other groups, and how particular world views are being maintained or contested," (Eriksen, 1993: 1-2) (though for our purposes rather than "ethnic relations," "religious community relations" should be inserted instead.)[21] Secondly, Eriksen himself opens the way for his study to be utilized in the context of Islamic movements in the Middle East by asserting its similarity to ethnic movements.[22] Such an expansion of these theories and concepts is possible because Eriksen regards ethnicity as only one aspect of the larger category of "social identity." Indeed, he himself encourages a move from a narrow focus on ethnicity to a broader spectrum:

> Is it still analytically fruitful to think about the social world in terms of ethnicity? Perhaps a wider term, such as 'social identity', would be more true to the flux and complexity of social processes, and would allow us to study group formation and alignments along a greater variety of axes than a single-minded focus on 'ethnicity' would. (Eriksen, 1993: 157)

Thus, this thesis adopts its definition of identity from Eriksen, not based on anthropological theories related solely to ethnicity or nationalism, but drawing rather on the concept of "social identity," the wider basis on which Eriksen's work is founded.

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[21] This is not to say that "ethnic relations" and "religious community relations" may be understood as identical, only that the questions asked with regard to such relations may be the same. There are, indeed, some very important distinctions between the two, perhaps the most compelling of which is that, while ethnicity may be inescapable due to the language one speaks or the color of one's skin, such is rarely the case with a religious community. Eriksen (1993) asserts that "ethnic identity sticks to the individual, that one cannot entirely rid oneself of it" (34). While it may be that escaping from a religious identity so as to "entirely rid oneself of it" could be quite difficult, it would rarely be considered nigh on impossible as it often is with respect to ethnicity. A second distinction is the potential that ethnic identity may be "imposed from the outside, by dominant groups, on those who do not themselves want membership in the group to which they are assigned" (Eriksen, 1993: 33). While in the context of a religious community persuasive measures may be used to recruit and sustain members, imposition from the outside of an unwanted membership identity is much less conceivable than it would be with an ethnic identity. These are just two of the distinctions which seemed most conspicuous on my reading of Eriksen. Undoubtedly there must also be other important differences as well.

[22] Eriksen (1993) identifies the similarities between the Islamic movement and ethnic movements as the following: they are both anti-modernist, traditionalist, and both "aim at a reconstitution of seemingly vanishing aspects of society, culture and identity" (152). Whether or not we agree with this assessment (in particular describing the *Nur* movement as anti-modernist strikes me as highly problematic) that Eriksen allows for such a comparison at all is significant.

Understanding identity to be "social identity," at its most elementary level, means simply that it is "based on a contrast vis-à-vis others" (Eriksen, 1993: 12). That is, social identity is necessarily relational. It is both constructed and articulated in the context of those not ascribing to such an identity: "Group identities must always be defined in relation to that which they are not—in other words, in relation to non-members of the group" (Eriksen, 1993: 10). Because social identity forms and exists in situations of contact, not isolation, it follows that it may be situationally variable; it is negotiable and fluid, not fixed. The identity itself may "to a considerable degree be manipulated by the agents themselves" (Eriksen, 1993: 31), in that they may cause a given identity to be more or less relevant. It is, therefore, possible for agents to over- or under-communicate social identity based upon what is most prudent in their specific circumstances. These two characteristics of social identity, its relational nature and its negotiability, are crucial to this study not only because they help to illuminate the ever-elusive concept of identity and emphasize how it may be differentially employed, but also because the interviews themselves, which comprise the basis of the study, created a specific situation in which the *Nur* identity was articulated and negotiated relative to me as an interviewer. The ways in which this could potentially complicate the results will be further addressed under the section on subjectivity below.

3.2 The Problematic

Having thus expounded upon the understanding of identity employed in this study, let us now turn to the problematic of the study itself. The question of identity will be addressed on two fronts, the identity of the group, i.e. the *Nur* movement, as a whole (Chapter 4), and the identity of the individuals involved in the movement (Chapter 5).[23] Each front will take up the problematic within comparable but distinct theoretical frameworks so as to most effectively consider the various aspects of identity at these two different levels. I will deliberate first on the conceptualization of the group identity, its accompanying theory and the research questions which thereby arise, to be followed by that of the individual identity.

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[23] Richard Jenkins asserts that "a theorization of social identity" necessarily requires taking into account both the individual and collective identities "in equal measure" (Jenkins, 1996: 19).

3.2.1 The Group Identity of the Nur Movement

A consideration of the collective identity of the *Nur* movement necessitates two parts, focusing first on its emergence and function and second on the nature of its continuing distinction vis-à-vis others. The first section, the emergence and function of the movement, will be studied in light of Norbert Elias's The Society of Individuals, and specifically of his essay included in that work entitled "Changes in the We-I Balance."   Elisabeth Özdalga, in a hitherto unpublished article on identity, considers Elias's theory of modernity and the impact modernity has had on the balance between the individual, the "I," and the group to which that individual relates herself, the "we." Özdalga summarizes the effect of modern society on this We-I balance in the following manner:

> In pre-modern society, it is the family and the local community, the village or the tribe, which constitutes the significant "we" for the individual "I." But with the development of a society based on increasingly more complex interrelationships, and a more distinct state organization to coordinate this complex social configuration, the state also takes on the role of the more significant integration unit—the we—for the individual. […] [T]he significant 'survival units' have changed, from family, tribe, village communities, to the nation state. (Özdalga , unpublished: 13)

Thus, modernity is seen as a process which fundamentally alters an individual's relationship to society and his sources of identity or social belonging. According to Elias, the nation-state and its institutions have begun to fill this role, becoming the "we" in the place of traditional familial or tribal groups. This change, at the same time, increases the need for personal social connections, which are not provided by the state, to be established through means other than those previously relied upon, for example, by a religious group. Such a conceptualization allows us to consider the emergence of the *Nur* movement in light of modernity, as it, very significantly, arose at a time of rapid modernization in Turkey. It will also allow us to consider where the *Nur* movement itself fits into this "We-I balance," i.e. what function it serves for its adherents and what the adherents themselves identify as their own "survival units."

Several specific questions arise when considering the *Nur* movement in light of this theoretical approach; these will be addressed with reference to the conducted

interviews in Chapter Four. First, what is the relationship of the *Nur* movement to modernity? May it be considered a result of or reaction to the changes in society which accompany modernization? Second, in what ways may the *Nur* movement itself be understood as a "survival unit" and what are the limitations to this schema? And, finally, if the *Nur* movement may be classified as a "survival unit," how does this affect the relationship between its adherents and the nation-state? Does the nation-state continue to be an important "we" for *Nur* students?

The second section regarding the *Nur* movement's collective identity will be constructed around the concept of group boundaries and boundary maintenance as presented by Thomas Hylland Eriksen in Ethnicity and Nationalism: Anthropological Perspectives, a presentation which relies heavily on the theories of Fredrik Barth. Barth's influential model encourages researchers to focus not on the "cultural stuff" that may be observed within a group but rather on the boundaries which encircle that "cultural stuff" and delineate the group from those outside of it. That such boundaries exist may seem obvious; however, that such boundaries are actively maintained seems less so, and is perhaps even more important. Thus a study of collective identity based on the concept of boundaries considers both what separates one group from another and how that separation is sustained or, as Eriksen states, "the ways in which groups manage to remain discrete" (Eriksen, 1993: 27).

In the specific context of the *Nur* movement, a study of its boundaries will occur on three levels: first, to clarify its identity vis-à-vis others in a very general sense, simply defined as anyone not within the group; second, to consider its identity within the more narrow context of Islamic groups in Turkey and how it differentiates itself within this category; and finally to delineate the distinctions between the smaller groups within the *Nur* movement itself. Thus, taking up the questions of what boundaries exist and how they are maintained with regard to all three of these levels will constitute the heart of this portion of the study. The nature of the boundaries themselves will also be attended to as questions such as, to what degree are the boundaries fixed versus fluid and to what extent are they open versus closed, are addressed.

3.2.2 The Individual Identity of Nur Students

Once the collective has been considered, I will turn my attention to the individual identity of the *Nur* students. Here a slightly different theoretical framework will be applied so as to account for the differences that exist in constructing individual as opposed to group identity. I will utilize Richard Jenkins' model of "the internal-external dialectic of identification" from his book, <u>Social Identity</u>. Jenkins (1996) describes this dialectic as constituting individual (and for that matter, collective) identity through "an ongoing, and in practice simultaneous, synthesis of (internal) self-definition and the (external) definitions of oneself offered by others" (Jenkins, 1996: 20).

This model admittedly resembles the boundary model used to analyze collective identity in that much of the shaping of identity occurs at the point of interaction between that which is inside and that which is outside. Indeed, Jenkins, too, has taken Barth and his boundary model as a jumping off point for his framework:

> One of Barth's key propositions is that it is not enough to send a message about identity; that message has to be accepted by significant others before an identity can be said to be 'taken on.' As a consequence, identities are to be formed and negotiated at their boundaries, where the internal and the external meet. (Jenkins, 1996: 24)

Thus, Jenkins too emphasizes the point of interaction as the crux of identity construction. However, Jenkins model may also be employed to consider not only that which happens at the boundary of the self, but that which happens within the self as well. The "message" of identity he speaks of in the previous passage is formed within the self, internally, and then sent to be presented for acceptance at the boundary. This two-step understanding of the process, therefore, allows for a contemplation of changes which may take place internally, through new forms of self-definition that are then tested at the boundary of the self.[24]

I find this extra space in Jenkins' framework particularly important in light of the interviews conducted for this thesis. Most of the interviewees expressed very

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[24] It should be noted here that this idea of identity construction as also, in some fashion, occurring internally is not emphasized by Jenkins. While I argue that it is possible to employ his model in this way for the purposes at hand, that is not to say that he would necessarily endorse such a usage. It is, rather, a re-interpretation of his model on my part, but one which, I think, is possible given the idea of internal self-definition that he describes.

personal, intimate forms of new self-definition as a result of their involvement in the movement which might be lost or overlooked if the internal is not accounted for. This is not to say that these internal forms of identity construction are not relational, but rather that their relational aspect occurs not between people but between the individual and what is understood by the individual to be God's message to them through His servants or prophets. In this way, the individual identity must be tackled differently than that of group identity, in a fashion that allows for identity construction which occurs, still in relationship, not between people, but between a person and a text which that person values highly and understands to be religious. I would argue that this slightly different interpretation of Barth's boundary model is appropriate here given that the group under consideration is not an ethnic group, which is the context for which his model was originally developed, but rather a religious group which is, according to the interviewees, highly intimate in nature. Thus, while the majority of this portion of the study will also be framed by what must be considered a boundary model, identity formation which occurs at the point of interaction between the internal and the external, internal changes in identity occurring away from the boundary between people will also be addressed.

When considering the application of this internal-external dialectic of identification to the *Nur* movement itself, many potential research questions surface, of which this study will focus on three. First, the synthesis of self-definitions with the external definitions supplied by those outside the movement (the "outside other") will be considered, looking specifically at the way in which the *Nur* students portray (or don't portray, as the case may be) their involvement in the movement to acquaintances, family and friends, the title (if any) that they choose to adopt and the difficulties that they perceive as coming from the external with regard to their identity. Second, I will take up the issue of whether and in what ways the movement impacts or prescribes the individual's interaction with those outside the movement, thereby considering the synthesis of internal self-definitions with those of the "inside other." In particular the values which are imparted by the movement and the extent to which these values are internalized by the *Nur* students will be discussed. Finally, I will discuss the question of internal individual identities and how the *Nur* students

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perceive their self-definitions to have altered on a personal level due to their involvement in the movement.

3.3 Subjectivity: The Interviewees and the Interviewer

This completes a brief overview of the problematics which will be considered when analyzing the interviews and the theoretical foundation which will inform said analysis. Before proceeding to take up the previously outlined research questions in Chapters Four and Five, however, it is necessary to linger briefly on the issue of subjectivity and how it relates to the research at hand. The potential for partiality exists on two accounts: those of the interviewees and my own as an interviewer and analyst. This study adopts an *emic* approach in that the objective is to convey and analyze the identity of the *Nur* movement and its followers from the perspective of the adherents of the movement themselves. Eriksen, in a footnote, defines this approach in the following manner: "In the anthropological literature, the term *emic* refers to 'the native's point of view'. It is contrasted with *etic*, which refers to the analyst's concepts, descriptions and analyses" (Eriksen, 1993: 11). It is because of this approach that the only criteria for an interviewee to be suitable, aside from age and gender considerations, was that he/she had to identify him/herself as a "*Risale-i Nur talebe*" (*Nur* student). Their levels of participation, lengths of involvement, or other tangible criteria were not pre-requisites; it was rather based upon their own perception of themselves, what Michael Moerman would refer to as an *emic category of ascription* (Eriksen, 1993: 11). The *emic* approach further encourages an attention to and allowance for the internal changes in identity spoken of above because they, as *Nur* students, assert that such transformations have occurred within themselves due to their study of the *Risale-i Nur*.

However, with this approach some difficulties naturally ensue. First, to what extent may that which is conveyed by the interviewees be understood as representative or reliable. And, second, in what ways does my position as an interviewer and analyst potentially affect or skew the results. Eriksen identifies the tendency for there to be some inconsistency between how one represents herself and how she actually lives:

> There are often discrepancies between what people say and what they do
> […]. Indeed, many anthropologists (for instance Holy and Stuchlik, 1983)
> hold that it is the chief goal of our discipline to investigate and clarify the
> relationship between notions and actions, or between what people say and
> what they do. (Eriksen, 1993: 16)

Thus the identities, group and individual, which are presented in an interview may or may not mirror the reality; indeed, this would be the case in any situation given what has been previously established regarding the negotiability of identity. The *Nur* students are negotiating their identity in the particular context of an interview regarding their adherence to the *Nur* movement, a setting which is bound to encourage the over-communication of some aspects and the under-communication of others.

Further complicating the issue is my presence at the interview, for two reasons. First, I am foreign, female and from another religious background, which creates an even more complex dynamic when it comes to identity negotiation. For example, I noticed with some interviewees a strong tendency to promote the unity of the movement over its diversity, one even going so far as to almost eliminate the possibility of any diversity within the movement or the Islamic religion at all. Given that I am an outsider, not only to the movement, but also to the culture and the religion of the interviewees, this might be understood as an attempt to portray a unified front against the many differences which I represent. This may, then, be one instance in which my identity as an interviewer determined or swayed the responses I received.

In addition to the potential impact of my identity on that which was presented by the interviewees, there is also the complication of my own opinions and background. I cannot pretend to be completely objective in my analysis, though I strive to be. Undoubtedly my own ideas contribute to that which I see and that to which I am blind, especially given that this thesis takes up the question of religion. My perception of religion itself affects the manner in which I conducted this study and interpreted its results. I am a person of strong personal religious conviction and, though my own beliefs differ from those of the students who I interviewed, it nonetheless had an impact. For example, I gave great credence to their explanations of internal transformation, leading to my insistence on including internal changes in

self-definition as part of the theoretical framework for interpreting individual identity, largely because I have experienced such transformations myself.

These various complications should not be forgotten as we proceed to consider the interviews in light of the research questions presented above. Though it is not possible to eliminate such subjectivities, one may come closest to achieving objectivity by being ever aware of their presence.

CHAPTER FOUR

GROUP IDENTITY

The following chapter on the group identity of the *Nur* movement will look at the question in two parts. First, a consideration of the emergence of the *Nur* movement and the role or function it fulfills in the lives of *Nur* students will be addressed. Second, a study of the way in which the boundaries of the movement are delineated vis-à-vis others, both in a general sense, encompassing any who are not within the movement, and on a more specific level, in contrast to other Islamic groups in Turkey, will be forged. The question of boundaries will also be taken up within the group itself, looking at different sub-groups which have emerged and how they erect and maintain boundaries against others within the movement. An attempt will be made to integrate methodology and data, thus expounding upon the theoretical framework presented in the previous chapter while also utilizing the perspectives of the *Nur* students. What results is an interplay between the works of Norbert Elias, Fredrik Barth and Thomas Hylland Eriksen and the statements made by the students in the interviews themselves.

4.1 The Emergence: Modernity and the Nur Movement

One of the most basic premises of Norbert Elias's "Changes in The We-I Balance," the essay around which this and the following section will be framed, is that the relations between an individual and society are not static but dynamic, changing over time, the changes being most dramatic with the onset of modernization. Elias (1991) notes that as societies develop, the way in which the

individual interacts with them fundamentally alters and he cites modernization as a case in point. However, while the economic and technical progress of modernization has received much notice, according to Elias, little has been made of the transformation in the relations between "we" and "I":

> Less attention, as a rule, is given to the fact that in the course of such a development process [i.e. modernization] the whole position of the individual in his society, and thus the personality structures of individuals and their relations to each other, are changed in a specific way. (Elias, 1991: 177)

Before considering the further development of Elias's theorization, i.e. the specificities and ramifications of these changes affected by modernization, let us pause briefly and turn to the relationship between modernization and the *Nur* movement.

The assertion that modernization brings with it modifications in individual-societal relations is significant to the study at hand given the correlation between the rise of the *Nur* movement and the modernization process in Turkey.[25] It also provides an appropriate starting place for considering how the *Nur* students themselves view the movement, in that beginning with the group's emergence seems to possess a kind of chronological appropriateness. In the interviews I did not ask any direct questions regarding the relationship between modernity and the group's emergence, not wanting to influence or guide too heavy-handedly the interviewees' responses. It is interesting that, despite a lack of suggestion on my part, many of them noted a connection between Nursi's work and the specific time at which he lived, thus implying, though without using the term modernization, that the *Risale-i Nur* is intimately connected with the period in which it surfaced. Indeed, many said that the very reason for the *Risale-i Nur* was to address the problems of modern life in an Islamic manner and that, had Nursi lived at a different time, he would have written something appropriate to the problems and needs of that time, something quite different. Of course, as the following excerpt from an interview will indicate, Nursi himself said something to this effect, which has undoubtedly shaped the

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[25] For more about the historical context in which the *Nur* movement began please refer to Chapter Two. For a brief discussion of the debate regarding the place of the modernization discourse in the study of Nursi and the movement see section 2.1 "A Caveat: The Need for Balance."

opinion of his followers. Nonetheless it is notable that within their perspective resides this correlation between Nursi's time period and what he has written. Berat, one of the young men interviewed, states this in the following manner:

> Actually the *Nurcu*[26] movement is an interpretation of how to live Islam today just like Mevlana or Imam Muazzam in different times have come and interpreted Islam at their times based on the conditions around them. For example, Bediüzzaman[27] has said, if I had come at Mevlana's time I would have written the *Mesnevi* and if he had come at my time he could have written the *Risale-i Nur*. It is exactly like that. He comes at this time, he sees the needs of the sick or needy, and interprets what kind of response Islam would give. […] It is a group or movement of how Islam should be lived in our age.[28]

Thus, while the *Nur* students didn't express any analysis of the ramifications of modernization on society or its contribution to the specific characteristics of the movement, they did identify that this movement emerged in the midst of modernity with the intention of addressing the particular problems of the period.

4.2 The Function: Shifting "Survival Units" and the Nur Movement

Having established that modernization affects societal changes and that *Nur* students understand Nursi and the corresponding movement to be, if not a result of, at least a response to said changes, let us now return to Elias to consider in a more detailed fashion the exact types of transformations which accompanied modernization. According to Elias, one of the most significant changes we observe is the alteration in the "survival units" over time, both in the form which they take (tribe, family, nation-state, and beyond) and in their importance vis-à-vis the individual (the so called "We-I balance"). "Survival units" comprise those groups

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[26] At the time of Berat's and Ahmet's interviews I was unaware of the potential offensive nature of the word "*Nurcu*" and thus used it freely. Indeed, Berat tried to communicate it's inappropriateness to me in a subtle fashion but I did not pick up on it at the time of the interview (though it became obvious upon listening to the recording). I can only assume, therefore, that their use of the term "*Nurcu*" was a result of my employment of the term and should not be understood as an endorsement of this term, which all but one of the interviewees said was not an agreeable one. In the later interviews, when I had adjusted my own terminology, the term *Nurcu* was only employed by an interviewee once, as will be noted in a footnote later in this chapter.

[27] Said Nursi is alternately called "Bediüzzaman," (the Wonder of the Age) or "Usta" (Master/Teacher) by the interviewees. They do not refer to him as Nursi. The title "Hocaefendi" refers to Fethullah Gülen while "Efendi" refers to the Prophet Mohammed.

[28] Berat (3:45). See also Ahmet (11:15), Selim (18:30), Eda (23:30) and Emre (8:45) in Appendix B.

which ensure the security and protection of an individual against various threats, be they physical or social; they are the place to which one can turn for help. With modernization the "survival unit" on which people depend has moved more and more away from tribe and family and toward the nation-state, as Elias explains:

> [A]t earlier stages the family group was the primary, indispensable survival unit for individuals. It has not quite lost this function, especially for children. But in more recent times the state […] has absorbed this function of the family like many others. […] At present the age of the autonomous tribe is coming to an end all over the world. Everywhere they are relinquishing to states their role as independent survival units and as the highest-ranking reference groups for the we-identity of individuals. (Elias, 1991: 205, 206)

As a result of this shift to a new we-identity there also surfaces a need to re-establish personal connections and social relations which, formally provided by the tribe or family, cannot be as fully serviced by the state.

It is, first, in meeting this need for such connections and relations that the *Nur* movement can be understood to correspond to Elias's theory regarding "survival units." Both those *Nur* students who live in the community houses established by the movement, *cemaat* houses, and those who do not express that the movement, often through the *Risale-i Nur*, has helped them to form and maintain close personal relationships. One young woman, Yasemin, who lives with her family but is active in the movement, finds the *Risale* to be the glue which holds together the closest friendships in her life:

> My best friends are my friends from middle school, we are the closest. We are connected to each other by our way of thinking, the things we believe, the way our families are, our culture. The *Risale* is one of our common points. It binds us together, unifies us. I don't just see them at discussion groups (*sohbet*). We also go out together, go shopping; we do all types of activities together. We go to a concert together or are involved in a civic group. We are always together because there are things that bind us together and the *Risale* is one of those. Also, you know that a person who goes to the *Risale* discussion groups possesses different attributes. It is a person who has these attributes that can be your friend. For that reason you are very good friends (*dost*) with that person. You are closer. It has a characteristic of unifying [us together.][29]

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[29] Yasemin (13:00)

Yasemin perceives two of the functions of the movement in her life, then, to be, first, a vital bonding agent for her already-established friendships, and, second, a context for meeting people, through the *sohbets*, who would have the qualities she desires in a friend. Berat, who lives in one of the *cemaat* houses, likewise conceives of the movement as having been important in the formation of close personal relationships. For him it has afforded a means by which he can live together with other *Nur* students with a closeness and intimacy that is reminiscent of a family, if not even more intense than that experienced in most families. He describes, in the following excerpt, what it is like to live as housemates with other *Nur* students:

> [B]eing in the same house, doing good things together, speaking of good things, saying our prayers, and worshipping together, this is actually the meaning of a person's life. Living in accordance with this life purpose will make us happy both in this world and in the world to come. And because it is important to God, living in the same house together, doing good things together is good.[30]

The movement thus serves as a necessary accompaniment to the transference from family we-identity to nation-state we-identity by providing for the students' need for connection and linkage with other people. However, based upon the interviews, it seems that the movement does far more than that for its adherents. Indeed, it could be argued that the movement itself functions as a "survival unit" of sorts for the students.

4.2.1 The Nur Movement as a "Survival Unit"

It should be noted here briefly before proceeding that, while Elias's concept of a "survival unit" refers to that which secures the most basic necessities in life, it will be used in reference to the *Nur* movement in a slightly different sense. Rather than being a means by which a person's *physical* needs are met, I have superimposed this concept of "survival unit" upon the *social, emotional* and *spiritual* needs of the *Nur* students, thereby analyzing the way in which, particularly from the *emic* perspective, the *Nur* movement provides protection and help for these more intangible yet nevertheless vital necessities. Indeed, the interviews highlighted a number of areas in which the students themselves recognized and articulated such

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[30] Berat (11:00)

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"survival unit" roles in the social, emotional and spiritual realms. They expressed that the movement served as a place they could turn for guidance, a means by which they could discover how to address the societal problems around them and a strength they could call upon in the face of a variety of perceived threats. Let us consider each of these services one by one as recounted by the students themselves to gain fuller insight into how the *Nur* movement might be considered a "survival unit."

Ahmet, who resides in one of the *cemaat* homes, explains the way in which the movement provides him with guidance regarding the choices he makes in life. He finds living in a community like this helps him to ascertain the proper path: "This is our goal, to learn and follow the path taught by our Prophet in the Koran and to do it together because a person sometimes cannot decide on his own whether something is right or wrong."[31] Eda does not live in a *cemaat* house but, nevertheless, also perceives the movement, and more specifically the *Risale* itself, as giving her guidance to work out the difficulties in her life: "Here when you find God, it also shows you the way to go, or shows you a shortcut. It is like solving a problem. Life is a ball of problems, anyway. The *Risale* gives you the equations (*denklemler*). With the help of those equations, you solve it."[32] Thus, it seems, whether one lives within the *cemaat* community or is only involved in it, the movement is a place the students turn for aid.[33]

The movement is also concerned with addressing the societal problems that exist in Turkey. Fatih shared that one of the speakers at a recent conference he attended urged the participants to apply the *Risale-i Nur* to current issues in society:

> He [the conference speaker] said, 'Ok, in the *Risale-i Nur* we have a big gift, a big thing, a big strength, it may even be a diamond, but how much can we use it today? Let's talk about this,' he said. 'And in life, social life, what kinds of solutions can we provide? For example, Turkish unemployment, lovelessness or nationalism,' he mentioned these kinds of difficulties. [He asked,] 'What kinds of solutions can we find with the *Risale-i Nur*?'[34]

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[31] Ahmet (2:30)

[32] Eda (22:30)

[33] See also Yasemin, (23:30) in Appendix B for a discussion of the way in which *ablas* ("older sisters") in the group provide guidance to the younger girls.

[34] Fatih (8:30)

Fatih here indicates that within the movement itself a discourse regarding social concerns exists and that the movement is willing to take on some of the larger issues in the lives of people around them, attempting not simply to help, but to actually solve the problems. This, possibly more than the guidance the movement provides, would seem to imply the function of a "survival unit," given that this is a role the nation-state would normally be thought to tackle. For the students themselves, though, the guidance offered meets more of their immediate, personal needs and thereby must also be seen as a crucial factor in the "survival unit" designation.

Perhaps that which most encourages this designation, however, is the way in which the students identify the movement as protecting them in the face of a plethora of threats. While the word protection may traditionally bring to mind thoughts of physical danger, defense against other forms of peril may be just as central to an individual's sense of well-being, if not more so. Particularly given the religious convictions of the interviewees, they also give considerable priority to forms of "spiritual" danger. The *Nur* students expressed four types of threats which the movement helps to guard against: temptation to sinful behavior, depression, attacks on their beliefs by others and the risk of falling away from their faith.

Resembling the way in which the movement offers guidance leading to the right path, mentioned by Ahmet above, Fatih likewise identifies one function of the movement being to shield the adherents from walking down a sinful path:

> We try to meet with each other [as *Risale-i Nur talebeleri*] because […] when we have *sohbets* it both closes roads to sin and strengthens your own faith. When I am with these friends at least we don't have worldly conversations. For example, if we are going to speak about sports we open and read something that will allow us to improve ourselves instead.[35]

Fatih articulates that meeting together acts in both a preventative and a proactive way to keep the students from sin, defensively closing the paths to sin and offensively building up the individual's faith and thereby his ability to better battle with sin.

A second threat perceived by the interviewees is that of depression. Berat discusses the depression or hopelessness experienced by some of his *Nur* friends, likewise emphasizing the importance of being together. For these students, their

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[35] Fatih (18:00)

position as a member of the *Nur* community helps to protect them against falling into despair:

> And some of our friends say that they cannot find peace when by themselves; they cannot live alone. When they are not with other people bad things are always coming to their minds. But they say when they are with us that they are always thinking of good things and full of hope. […] That is one of the advantages of being together.[36]

Thus it is in the context of community that this perceived hazard may be effectively avoided.

In much the same way that the movement helps to ward off restlessness and dejection, it also comes alongside those being attacked in their beliefs and provides the courage and ability for them to respond to their attackers. Selim recounts a time when he experienced such aid in the face of opposition. On the internet he had come across a webpage which spoke poorly of the Prophet Mohammed. He believes that, had he not had a group to turn to, he would not have been able to combat the claims made by this site. Because he could not have produced a counteractive webpage alone, his inability would have, he feels, brought shame on all Muslims by implying that they didn't have the resources to react appropriately to such an attack. However, with the help of others in his *cemaat*, they were able to create an internet site responding to these claims. In light of this event Selim made the following observation:

> *Usta* says that at this time the *cemaat* is very important. Alone you cannot do anything because those on the other side always work as a group. Alone you cannot struggle with them. So, what are you going to do? You will be a *cemaat* and as a *cemaat* you will fight with them. I said fight but I mean you will destroy their ideas. When we look at it this way, the *cemaat* is important.[37]

For Selim, the danger he discusses here might as well have been physical danger. The language he uses indicates that, for him, this was like a battle; he must "struggle;" he must "fight." Because the *Nur* movement helped him to survive this

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[36] Berat (10:00). See also Cemal (19:30) in Appendix B for an excerpt on the danger of depression outside of a group setting.

[37] Selim (20:25)

skirmish, coming alongside him on the battlefield, he identifies it as being of great consequence.

The fourth and final threat which the *Nur* students see the movement shielding them against is the risk of falling away from their faith. In the face of this lurking hazard, the strength of the group once again serves as a safeguard, ensuring each individual's passage to heaven. Eda speaks of this peril and the movement's defense mechanism in the following manner:

> All of us are holding each other's hands. Our *Efendi* says we, as Muslims, should be firmly clasped together, holding hands and we will become like a wall. As *Risale-i Nur talebes*, that is what we are trying to do. Not for one of us to go to heaven, but for all of us to go together. Everyone should go holding someone's hand. […] We should hold tight and be an obstacle to someone else falling.[38]

Selim, like Eda, also asserts the importance of the group for resisting such a potentiality. In the context of discussing his desire to study abroad, he was adamant that, while his desire to do so was staunch, he would not go unless people from his *cemaat* were there to support him:

> However, if in the place where I would go there are no *abis* ["big brothers"] who read the *Risale-i Nur*, I won't go. For me, that must exist in the place I go. That is important. Because when I go, no matter how much I have read, I could [mess up] in that atmosphere. I could stop saying my prayers (*namaz kılmak*). That would be a very bad thing for me. But if there is one from our *cemaat* there, I can go.[39]

Thus, the solidarity which both Eda and Selim express as helping them to stay upright in their faiths has become for them a necessity, a means, if you will, of survival. This sense of necessity is so strong that Selim would rather forfeit his plans to study abroad, despite both the ways in which this could further his career and his own desire to experience another culture, than live in a place where his "survival unit" is not intact.

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[38] Eda (18:00)

[39] Selim (57:00)

4.2.2 The Nur Movement and the Nation-State: Competing "Survival Units"?

If, then, based upon the above arguments it may be said that the *Nur* movement functions as a "survival unit" for its adherents, providing them with help, guidance, ways to solve problems, and protection against threats, how does that affect the relationship between *Nur* students and the nation-state which, Elias (1991: 205) claims, has "taken over the role of the primary survival unit"? Does the *Nur* movement's functioning as helper and protector undermine the students' relationship with the nation-state as "survival unit," or perhaps even result in a complete rejection of it? These are also interesting questions in light of Camilla Nereid's assertion that a rejection of Turkish nationalism has historically characterized the *Nur* movement's relationship with the state (see Chapter 2, "Nursi and Nationalism"). When considering these questions in light of the interviewees' statements about nationalism and Turkishness, the answers are highly variable, not allowing for an absolute negative or affirmative, but rather falling somewhere within a broad spectrum. Some *Nur* students, it seems, embrace the *Nur* movement and the nation-state as actors on behalf of their survival, clinging whole-heartedly to both. Some, on the other hand, deny the necessity of the nation-state's existence, calling instead upon unification under the banner of Islam. While many, perhaps most, of those interviewed, fall somewhere between the two extremes.

The first of these possible reactions, embracing both the *Nur* movement and the nation-state as "survival units," is not in conflict with Elias's theory, though he might argue that one most likely takes precedence over another. Indeed, it highlights Elias's emphasis on the complexity of humanity at this particular stage of development and illustrates his concept of multi-layered we-identities, as he explains below:

> In the present structure of human society, by contrast, the expression 'we', and so, too, the social habitus of individuals in a wider sense, has many layers. The usefulness of the concept of the we-I balance as a tool of observation and reflection may perhaps be enhanced if we pay some attention to this multi-layered aspect of we-concepts. It matches the plurality of interlocking integration planes characteristic of human society at its present stage of development. (Elias, 1991: 202)

It is in the context of this multi-layered, plurality of "survival units" that the following enthusiastic statement regarding nationalism by Eda may best be

interpreted. Perhaps the most extreme in her endorsement of Turkishness, though Yasemin, too, presented a sterling commentary on the history and values of the Turkish culture,[40] Eda appeared to burst with pride and conviction when offering the following remarks:

> I am a little bit of a nationalist, probably. I am really a nationalist. Living on the land on which we are found, I don't understand people who think differently. The land we live on is ours, we live here. […] We are under one flag, we speak one language, and we have only one march [national song]. These are the things that make us a group, and the things that keep us unified. We have from one to a thousand unifying things. […] Either you are going to love this country or leave it. If you are not pleased, if you are not happy, then leave. […] We live in an unmatchable (*eşsiz*) country. […] Turkishness is unequaled (*eşsiz*).[41]

It is important to note that Eda's eager approval of the Turkish nation did not in any way lessen her identification of the need for and importance of the *cemaat* in her life. It would seem that the two coexisted as vital we-identities, a coexistence which, from her perspective, need not involve discord.

Many of the *Nur* students interviewed articulated a similar plurality of we-identity layers, though most did not endorse the nation-state and Turkish nationalism as unreservedly as Eda. Ahmet's perspective serves as a good representative of this center position:

> Let me say this. Religious things rank higher than many things. When Islam first came racism dominated. In contrast to this, as it says in the *hadiths*, when Islam came the things which were before Islam, such as ties due to racism and old practices, were destroyed. […] With that in mind, I neither regret being a Turk, nor am I proud. I could have been another nationality, American, English or French. But I was born here and, as would be normal, when something good happens I want it to happen in Turkey. That is something inside of me. I want good things to come to me but that doesn't mean that something bad has to happen to you. This type of nationalism

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[40] See Yasemin (33:30) in Appendix B. This passage is particularly interesting in light of the way in which she views Turkishness in relation to Ottoman times and culture. Her perspective may have been shaped by her involvement with the Gülen movement given that M. Hakan Yavuz describes Gülen as, "first and foremost an Turko-Ottoman nationalist." See Yavuz (2003, "The Gülen Movement": 24).

[41] Eda (32:45). It is interesting to note that part of Eda's statement here ("either you are going to love this country or leave it" (*ya sev ya da terk et*)) is drawn directly from the slogan of the National Action Party (MHP), a party known in Turkey for its strong nationalist sentiments.

exists; [the desire] to have a good or beautiful thing be your country's is appropriate.[42]

Ahmet, while still identifying a multi-layered 'we,' is cognizant of a hierarchy of said multiple identities, clearly ranking Islam above the nation-state. Thus he neither fully advocates for nor fully rejects the nation state, acknowledging instead its ambiguous role as a partial, though not a primary, "survival unit." While this schema may more readily admit to potential tensions between the two we-identities than Eda's did, Ahmet likewise does not identify an inherent discord between the movement or Islam and the nation-state. It is thus that his perspective represents the middle ground.

On the other extreme are those *Nur* students who view the nation-state as inherently at variance with the purposes of the movement or who deny the necessity of its existence. Selim understands defining oneself based on nation or race as clashing with one of the most fundamental goals of the *Nur* movement, the spread of Islam:

> I am not a nationalist, let me say that openly. If our Prophet had been a nationalist, Islam could not have spread, because if he had been nationalistic it would have stayed with the Arabs. […] In the service of faith (*iman hizmetçiliğinde*) nationalism and racism cannot exist. If you want to save faith, you are not going to differentiate based on nationality.[43]

As the preceding excerpt reveals, for Selim, not only does the nation-state desist from being the primary we-identity, it embodies a potential obstacle to the goals and purposes essential to his chief "survival unit." Berat likewise does not embrace the nation-state, calling rather upon Islam as that which constitutes his "highest-ranking" we-identity:

> For that reason, no race is above another. For example, Judaism is a race; if one of my Jewish brothers is a Muslim, he is more valuable for me than a Turk who is not a Muslim. Race is not important at all. The important thing is brotherhood in Islam. […] For that reason, if we are brothers due to Islam, which country you come from is not important to me at all. For that reason being a Turk or being another nationality is not important at all.[44]

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[42] Ahmet (53:00)

[43] Selim (42:45)

[44] Berat (36:30). See also Fatih (42:00) in Appendix B for another statement Islam over nationalism.

For both of these young men, then, Islam takes priority over the nation-state as the 'we' of which they consider themselves a part and to which they turn. Indeed, Berat goes one step further, not only setting up Islam as a competing "survival unit," but calling into question the very necessity of the nation-state's existence:

> At the heart of Islam there is nothing which seeks to improve or better a race. For example, if I am a Turk, I never have a desire for the Turks to be the highest/best or to lead the world. What Islam wants us to realize is this: The world is a place and the people in the world should be brothers/sisters. For that reason, even borders are not necessary. If everyone is good, if Turkey and Greece are both Muslim, what is the necessity of a border between them?[45]

Such a call for a lack of borders implies an absolute rejection of the nation-state, as boundaries are obviously elemental to its existence and definition. Removing borders between countries essentially constitutes an erasure of the nation-state altogether.

4.2.3 Rejection of the Nation-State and a Global "Survival Unit"

The denial of the nation-state as a "survival unit" by some of the interviewees and the call upon a broader Islamic brotherhood as the source of unification and classification of people has a very interesting compatibility with what Elias asserts is the current status of "survival unit" transformation. Elias argues that, while nation-states have been the primary "survival unit," we appear to be moving into a period of increasing global integration where nation states are progressively losing their sovereignty to supra-state entities. This shift towards the integration of mankind, according to Elias, is observable in such global institutions as the United Nations and the World Bank, both of which comprise unions of states. However, Elias does not envision integration ending with these unions but extending out ever further until the sole remaining "survival unit" is humanity itself, as he states: "On the other hand, however, the function of the effective survival unit is now visibly shifting more and more from the level of the nation states to the post-national unions of states and, beyond them, to humanity" (Elias, 1991: 218). Later in the same essay Elias emphasizes the extent to which the whole of humanity on a

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[45] Berat (28:00).

global level already constitutes our 'we': "Even today the chances of survival depend largely on what happens on the global plane. It is the whole of mankind which now constitutes the last effective survival unit" (Elias, 1991: 226). Thus, Elias did not simply identify a shift from tribal and family units to nation-state units, but rather he theorizes an ever-expanding unit of reference for individuals, moving on to unions of states, the end of which must eventually be a global 'we.' At the time of writing in 1989, Elias asserts that already hints of this outermost, global "survival unit" were visible.

While the correlation is not exact, the similarities between Elias's theorization of "survival unit" expansion beyond the nation-state and the views expressed by those *Nur* students who reject nationalism are significant. Granted the *Nur* students have a different conception of the supra-state unit than Elias, defining it to be Islam rather than a union of states, and that is a considerable distinction. Nonetheless, Elias's theory may serve to better reveal the processes underneath which the ideas of the *Nur* students are being formed. It would be easy to assume that the establishment of transnational Islam, rather than the nation-state, in the role of primary "survival unit" would be indicative of an enormous step backward, a step away from progress and development. The overlap with Elias, however, could open the way to another interpretation which would plant the *Nur* students firmly in the midst of the current carrying us all, not backward but forward, toward an increasingly integrated humanity.

Indeed, the correlation between Elias's framework of global "survival units" and the perspectives of these interviewees is further strengthened by some of the *Nur* students' statements in which they articulate the outermost we-identity, not only moving past the nation-state to Islam as a unit of reference, but also moving from Islam to humanity. For example, Fatih states in the context of a question about nationalism: "The thing *Usta* wanted to say was that the real issue is being a Muslim, to be a person who has faith. Actually the real issue is just being a person."[46] We see here the progression from a Muslim to a humanity-based we-identity. Another *Nur* student, Emre, also invokes humanity as a we-identity in his understanding of Turkishness: "To be a Turk means to be a person (*Türk demek*

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[46] Fatih (41:00)

insan demek). To be a good Turk means to be a good person."[47] Both of these articulations of a global "survival unit" also contain a negotiation between that global unit and a less-expanded one, be that Turkishness or Islam. The presence of this negotiation between smaller and larger we-identities may indicate that the process is in a stage of transformation. While the global "survival unit" has not yet attained to the position of "highest-ranking," it has begun to compete in important ways with those smaller units and is being ever-more readily summoned.

Perhaps it is not possible, based on such limited data, to claim that the statements of these *Nur* students indicate, not their backwardness or traditionalism, but the extent of their progression, though I think the possibility should be opened for debate. At the very least, however, one may argue that Elias appears to have been accurate in his assertion of "survival unit" expansion. The ideas articulated by these *Nur* students did not mature in isolation but under a plethora of influences, one of which may very well have been the "long, unplanned social process, a process leading in many stages from smaller, less differentiated social units to larger, more complex ones" (Elias, 1991: 167) of which Elias spoke. Indeed, even the range of different "survival units" expressed by the *Nur* students, from a co-endorsement of nation-state and the *cemaat*, to a hierarchical categorization, to an outright rejection of the nation-state, would support Elias's model of social units in the midst of a shift. That some individuals would be at distinctly different points on the spectrum than others should be expected in situations of transition.

A consideration of the group identity of the *Nur* students in light of "survival unit" shifts not only serves to bolster Elias's theorization, however, but also helps to delineate the way the students' perceive the identity of the group in relation to their lives. Thus, the *Nur* movement, as understood by the students, emerged with specific reference to their time period and functions as at least one of their "survival units." Furthermore, the relationship between the *Nur* movement and nationalism as conceived of by the interviewees spans a long breadth, with some endorsing and some rejecting the nation-state as a co-existent "survival unit."

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[47] Emre (43:30)

4.3 The Boundaries: Inclusion and Exclusion in the Nur Movement

Having thus considered the emergence and functional aspects of the *Nur* movement in light of Norbert Elias (1991), the understanding of its group identity will be further augmented by the following study of its boundaries framed around the work of Thomas Hylland Eriksen (1993) and Fredrik Barth (1969). The first remark which needs to be made regarding a study of boundaries is an obvious one: boundaries require a group which exists within them and a group which exists outside. Eriksen states it in this way: "Finally, it is a universal fact that not everybody can take part in a given community. All categorizations of group membership must have boundaries; they depend on *others* in order to make sense" (Eriksen, 1993: 158). While such an observation may seem somewhat elementary, it is actually a crucial starting point for conceptualizing group identity because, in noting the reality of inclusion and exclusion, one must also acknowledge the processes by which that reality is established and maintained. It is these very processes which allow group identity to exist and to endure change; as Barth asserts, categorical distinctions "entail social processes of exclusion and incorporation whereby discrete categories are maintained *despite* changing participation and membership in the course of individual life histories" (Barth, 1969: 10).

Barth's use of the adjective "social" to describe these "processes" of inclusion and exclusion is also at the crux of a study of boundaries. He argues later in the essay that when determining processes of exclusion and incorporation, one should concentrate on that which is "*socially* effective." Thus a study of this sort does not simply seek to list all of the notable or "objective" differences between those on one side of the fence and those on the other, but rather must focus on those distinctions which are employed by the group members in situations of interaction and social organization, those which are "emphasized and made organizationally relevant by the actors" (Barth, 1969: 14). Accordingly, some of the differences which may be observed regarding the identity of a group by an analyst will not be significant at all to the actors themselves. Barth offers three categories in which any given difference may be placed based on the importance afforded to it by the group members: "some cultural features are used by the actors as signals and emblems of differences, others are ignored, and in some relationships radical differences are

played down and denied" (Barth, 1969: 14). What follows will thus be a consideration of the social processes of exclusion and incorporation employed by the adherents of the *Nur* movement to communicate "signals and emblems of difference." These processes will be analyzed on three different levels: those which differentiate first, *Nur* adherents and non-adherents in general, second, *Nur* adherents and adherents of other Islamic movements and, finally, adherents of the various *Nur cemaat*s from one another.

4.3.1 Dichotomization: Nur Adherents and Non-Adherents

In seeking to define both the general boundaries which delineate a *Nur* student from one who isn't and the manner in which those boundaries are maintained, it is helpful to draw once again from Barth's conceptualization. He understands there to be a "continuing dichotomization between members and outsiders" which distinguishes the one from the other. This dichotomization surfaces through cultural content[48] employed by actors to communicate, and one could even argue create, difference. According to Barth, said cultural content can be divided into two categories: "(i) overt signals and signs—the diacritical features that people look for and exhibit to show identity, often such features as dress, language, house-form or general style of life, and (ii) basic value orientations: the standards of morality and excellence by which performance is judged" (Barth, 1969: 14). The following consideration of the insiders and outsiders of the *Nur* movement will be organized around these two categories, studying the way in which, according to the interviews, first overt signals and signs and second basic value orientations are employed by the *Nur* students to exclude some and incorporate others, i.e. to form and preserve a boundary.

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[48] It must be noted here that the group delineated by these two categories is not understood as being defined by the cultural content they contain. Rather, that cultural content is the result of their membership in the group, as Barth explains, "In my view, much can be gained by regarding this [sharing of a common culture] as an implication or result, rather than a primary and defintional characteristic of ethnic group organization." (Barth, 1969: 11) Nonetheless, the cultural content is significant in that it helps to identify and maintain the boundaries I am hoping to define.

4.3.1.1 Overt Signals and Signs

Within the first category, overt signals and signs, two of the four examples listed by Barth proved particularly relevant for the purposes of this study in light of the data received in the interviews: language and dress. That is not to say that differences in house-form or general style of life are not utilized by *Nur* movement adherents to communicate a boundary. Rather, such distinctions were not observable in the interviews, an absence which could be attributed to the age and stage of life of the sample group. Given that they are all university students (except for one who just graduated from university recently), much of their house-form and general style of life are still informed, even determined, by either that of their parents or by the culture of university life, a culture which tends to level rather than exaggerate housing and life style differences. Thus, in regard to overt signals and signs we will consider only the two most compelling with regard to the data at hand, language first, followed by dress.

4.3.1.1.1 Language

According to the interviewees, the language of the *Nur* students in comparison to that of outsiders distinguishes them in two manners: the words which they use and that which they talk about. The distinction between the vocabulary of a *Nur* student and that of a non-adherent, even if the excluded individual is a part of another Islamic movement, stems from the language used in the *Risale-i Nur*. While the *Risale* leans heavily on the Koran and thus obviously employs Arabic words that would sound familiar to any practicing Muslim, Nursi also incorporated a considerable number of Ottoman and Farsi words which are not part of the typical vocabulary of a non-adherent. Indeed, the language of the *Risale* is so difficult that many of the interviewees noted an initial lack of motivation to read it due to the effort required. Over time, however, they have not only learned the meaning of the words, easing the strain, but the unique terminology has crept into their daily lives and now serves as an indicator of their status as a reader of the *Risale-i Nur*. Eda notes the way in which this vocabulary functions as an overt signal of inclusion:

> There is a lot of Ottoman and Farsi in the *Risale*. Whether or not you want to, as you read it you learn words. For many readers, these words are in their lives. If you have an opportunity to speak with them, you can

determine [that they read the *Risale*]. […] When they use these words I can definitely tell that they read the *Risale*. I say, if you know that word you have certainly read the *Risale*. For example, '*hodbin*' or '*bencil*'. […] Whether a person wants to or not, if you read it a lot [the language] comes into your life.[49]

Not only does the language of the *Risale* serve to identify people as part of the movement as Eda describes, it simultaneously functions as a method of boundary maintenance in that its difficulty requires new readers to approach long-time readers for help, thereby strengthening the bonds of incorporation and solidifying a basis of community relationships. Fatih explains the way in which the language of the *Risale* causes the younger students to seek explanation from the older ones:

> [When we began reading the *Risale*, we did so] by looking up in a dictionary the words we didn't know because the *Risale-i Nur* was written in old Turkish, in Ottoman Turkish and later it was translated into our Turkish. Those words are of course a little bit foreign to us today. In Turkey a significant degeneration happened in those days, [resulting in the loss of many] meaningful words. After this loss, by using the dictionary and by asking those who know better [we were able to understand]. When I say those who know better, I mean those who have been reading it for a long time, those people who are knowledgeable. […] When we listen to these kinds of people our connection with the *Risale* grows.[50]

Though Fatih notes at the end of this excerpt that his connection to the *Risale* grows as a result of listening to the older, more knowledgeable readers, I would argue that just as significantly, his connection to those *abis* also grows, creating and deepening the ties that bind the community together. Because the vocabulary of the *Risale* generates a need for help for beginning readers, it also ensures their integration with the more established *Nur* students.[51]

Aside from the distinction of the language itself, the content of a *Nur* student's speech may also be understood as an indication of their incorporation into the movement. Indeed, Berat highlights the restriction of the subject matter of conversations as being an essential aspect of community life:

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[49] Eda (6:15). For others expressing the distinct vocabulary of the *Nur* students see also Selim (6:15) and Meltem (1:45) in Appendix B.

[50] Fatih (2:30)

[51] The reverse may also be true, though it was in no way specified or implied in any of the interviews. Those first-time readers who are not offered or cannot find the help that they require to understand the *Risale* may abandon the task, thus allowing for a kind of border patrol.

First how we speak is important, what we talk about when we are together. Just like other people we can be involved in sports activities or social activities but when we speak we speak without cursing or talking very much about women and we suppress the evil feelings inside a person because otherwise you are always mixed up in lies and swearing and hurting someone else. For that reason when we come together we speak of what good things we can do in the future or what we can give to other people. Because we have plans for our future we can be at peace inside. And because we have not spoken about anything bad at the same time we keep our souls alive/active (*dinamik*).[52]

Berat thereby outlines rather definite guidelines for what topics are acceptable (the future, giving to others) and what topics aren't (women), as well as types of speech which must be avoided (lying, swearing). Although not stated by Berat himself, it may be assumed that one who repeatedly did not conform to these guidelines would find his identity as a *Nur* student in question. Indeed, one could argue that this boundary would be a more rigid one than the boundary of vocabulary discussed above. One may either integrate the terminology of the *Risale* into their daily life or not; its utilization appears to function more as a badge of honor, an indication of the extent to which one has studied, understood and internalized the *Risale*. The conventions regarding the content of conversation, on the other hand, are expected to be followed; this signal does not indicate a level of involvement but rather a code, the continual breaking of which, I contend, would lead to the offender being ostracized. The nature of code-like boundaries will be discussed more thoroughly under the second categorization of dichotomization, basic value orientations, below.

4.3.1.1.2 Dress

A second overt sign distinguishing the *Nur* adherents from non-adherents is their dress. While the language features discussed above seem to have been uniformly accepted among those interviewed, dress proved to be somewhat more controversial. Some interviewees acknowledged certain conventions in dress that indicated a *Nur* student but others maintained that, though in the past there had been a specific clothing preferences, such a custom no longer holds true today. These

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[52] Berat (9:00)

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differences of opinion regarding dress, according to one interviewee, run largely upon the lines of the various sub-groups in the *Nur* movement.[53]

Another interesting pattern regarding the presence or lack of a dress code was the variation based on gender. All the men identified that, at least at some point in the history of the movement, the male *Nur* students basically dressed alike, whether or not that is still the case in the present. The dress of the women, however, was not discussed without prompting. Indeed, the one dress convention that a person might expect for a devout Muslim woman, the covering of her head, was followed by only one of the three women interviewed. The other two expressed a desire to wear a head covering but had chosen not to up until this point because of the difficulties it causes as a university student and because of the preconceptions (*önyargı*) held by others when they see a covered woman. There was a general understanding that a woman's dress should be conservative but beyond that there did not appear to be any definite indication of dress as an overt signal among the women. This discrepancy based on gender may be largely attributed to the male-dominated nature of the movement; particularly in the past the movement was overwhelmingly composed of men, though it continues to be true in the present as well.

When turning to the actual dress tendencies of the men in the group, there was a general agreement that, at least at one point in time, slacks and a button-down shirt comprised the typical outfit. While those were the most common clothing conventions mentioned, others apparently exist(ed) as well. Demir offers the most thorough description as follows:

> Their mustaches are unique. They usually wear a ring. The ring comes from the *Sunnet*, actually; it is a more general thing. Every Muslim can wear it,

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[53] Demir identifies this distinction in dress between the sub-groups. He sets the Gülen movement apart in its flexibility with regard to clothing, which makes them harder to identify from the outside: "But it changes with the groups. For example, Hocaefendi's *hizmet* ["service"] group […] is a little bit more different. You may not be able to tell them from the outside. They dress like normal, other people. They can let their hair and beard grow long. They can dress in a more sporty fashion. To identify them is a little bit more difficult. The others will wear slacks and a button down" (Demir (4:30)). In the interviews I conducted, however, the three male members of the Gülen *cemaat* in the interviewee pool were all dressed according to the slacks and a button-down shirt convention.

however, these days *Nurcu*s[54] wear them more compared to other Muslims. I can tell from that and also, from their clothing [slacks and a button-down shirt]. From their face it is also apparent but I don't know how to express it as a rational thing. […] You also can't really imagine [a *Nur talebe* having] long hair. From there you can also tell.[55]

Demir himself conformed to all of these conventions of outward appearance except for the mustache. He, like the other six male interviewees, was clean shaven despite several references from various interviewees that a mustache is conventional.[56] Otherwise, however, Demir wore slacks, a button-down shirt, a corduroy blazer and a ring. His hair was cut short. Emre, on the other hand, wore a sweater and casual pants similar to jeans, his hair was slightly longer, though by no means long, and he wore no ring, thereby conforming closely to none of the conventions of outward appearance. Emre recognized the presence of a typical dress pattern but indicated extreme flexibility in the degree to which it is practiced:

> Some say that there is a specific outfit, slacks and a button-down shirt. There are those who wear it and those who don't. For example, I don't wear it. I can't determine anything by the clothing or the outward appearance. But I do believe in a difference in their face. There may be something in the face; sometimes a person can feel it.[57]

In total, of the seven young men interviewed, five of them corresponded to the minimal slacks and a button-down shirt convention at the time of our meeting. Thus, while some flexibility and controversy exists, it seems according to my admittedly minuscule sample, that this widely acknowledged overt signal is also still highly practiced.

Both Demir and Emre's quotations cited above identify a third overt signal, though it is not one that fits neatly into Barth's schema, when they speak of "a difference in their face." While this feature seems rather indefinable and thus hardly overt, it was mentioned so frequently by the interviewees as a tangible, external

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[54] It should be noted here that this was the only instance in the interviews I conducted where the word "*Nurcu*" was used on the initiative of the interviewee. Others who used the term did so because, at the time of their interview, I was using it myself, unaware of its potential offensive nature.

[55] Demir (3:15)

[56] For other excerpts which mention the mustache as well as comments on clothing conventions, see Ahmet (9:30) and Selim (6:00)

[57] Emre (20:30)

indicator of a person's being a *Nur* student that it would seem inappropriate to ignore it. Berat speaks of this "difference" as light and peace which show on a person's face:

> First of all, we believe you can read a person's heart on their face. When you look at those people on their faces there is a different "*nur*," something like a light. We feel it. […] If a person has inner peace it generally shows on their face. You can tell by feeling that they are *Nurcu*s.[58]

Yasemin, who also notes this quality as a distinguishing feature, further defines the "*nur*" present upon their faces by saying, "It is obvious from outward appearance, maybe in their face there is '*nur*,' the light that shines from the beauty of worship."[59] Thus, whether or not this characteristic is discernable by those outside the movement, it is certainly considered an indication of one's incorporation by those inside the movement and thereby comprises a boundary according to the *emic* perspective.

4.3.1.2 Basic Value Orientations

The second categorization which Barth cites as comprising the cultural content of dichotomization is that of "basic value orientation." As discussed briefly under the language section above, while all of the cultural content covered here in regard to dichotomization serves to create boundaries between the excluded and the incorporated, these boundaries are not necessarily created equally. Some may be seen more as suggestions or as indications of the extent to which you have embraced the movement (i.e. the badge of honor idea with regard to *Risale* vocabulary usage), but others are not characterized by such flexibility. Many of the boundaries defined by this second categorization have the potential to be more rigid than others, especially when applied in reference to a religious group, as they involve "standards of morality and excellence" (Barth, 1969: 14). In opting to be a part of the *Nur* movement, therefore, one also bows to the movement's standards, submitting to its judgment. Indeed, the acceptance of such judgment is one aspect of being associated with a given identity, as Barth explains: "Since belonging to an ethnic

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[58] Berat (5:00). For another mention of a difference in their faces see Ahmet (9:30) in Appendix B.

[59] Yasemin (1:45)

category implies being a certain kind of person, having that basic identity, it also implies a claim to be judged, and to judge oneself, by those standards that are relevant to that identity" (Barth, 1969: 14). The *Nur* students readily expressed the standards which correspond to their group identity. It was apparent that they were highly aware of the value orientations associated with the movement. Indeed, they often listed them off with such eagerness and in such volume that categorization becomes nigh on impossible. In lieu, therefore, of separating and discussing the value orientations by way of definite categories, let us look briefly at two such "lists" of *Nur* student standards.

Berat identifies various aspects of behavior and temperament which indicate to him that an individual is a *talebe* of the *Risale-i Nur*:

> We feel it from their look, their smile, from them not being too familiar with others but keeping an appropriate distance, from their being happy, and especially from their being peaceful. […] If a person does not have any inner peace they both speak of unimportant/empty things and speak without realizing what is really valuable in life. But there is nothing like that in these people [*Nur talebes*], they are always full of hope, and have peace. For that reason they can talk with everyone about everything.[60]

Berat's assessment of that which constitutes morality and excellence for a *Nur* student consists of two foci: a person's inner state and their interaction with others. With regard to one's inner state, Berat speaks of hope, happiness and peace, placing a special emphasis on inner peace. When it comes to interactions with others, his list is mostly composed of things that they avoid doing: being too familiar, getting inappropriately close, and speaking of unimportant things. He does, however, offer one standard which encourages rather than discourages an action: talking with everyone about everything.

Fatih's discussion of the basic value orientations of a *Nur* student picks up on the second of Berat's two foci, narrowing in on interaction with others:

> From their movements it can be obvious [that they are *Risale-i Nur* students]. They show love to people, for example, they don't say bad things (*kötü laf*), they don't look at anyone with hostility, they don't offend anyone's honor, (*kimsenin namusuna göz atmıoyrlar*), they treat everyone as they deserve.[61]

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[60] Berat (5:00)

[61] Fatih (15:15)

Much like Berat's, Fatih's list contains both actions one must avoid and actions one should be careful to engage in, with the first outweighing the second three to two. It is interesting to note that neither interviewee invoked the authority of a religious text or figure in identifying those standards by which another's performance is judged. Rather the lists they provide consist of behaviors largely consistent with cultural norms. Yasemin demonstrated an awareness of this connection to the culture as she, too, offered an example of the type of behavior *Nur* students embrace:

> In their actions, for example, they say good (*güzel*) things, or behave well. For example, they may hold the hand of an older person to help them. These are also practices that come from our culture, but our culture, Turkish culture, comes from Islam.[62]

The overlap of these behaviors and values with those advocated by Turkish culture is significant in that such similarities decrease the extent to which these actions or temperaments dichotomize insiders versus outsiders. It may seem, therefore, that in comparison to the first categorization, overt signals and signs, basic value orientations may be less effective in delineating boundaries. From the *emic* perspective, however, the opposite is true. They articulated that their behaviors vis-à-vis others their age or in their situation demarcates not a blurry but an explicit distinction between themselves and the outsiders. Indeed, two other themes which arose regarding standards of morality and excellence, refraining from fighting and respectful relationships with parents, were explained as behaviors which were in direct contrast to their contemporaries who do not read the *Risale*.

Selim shares the following story about how students at his high school, a *cemaat* school, differed significantly in their behavior from those at all of the other schools in his city:

> In [my hometown], in front of every school police are placed because events happen, both in front of the preparatory high schools (*kolej*) and the normal high schools. But the police did not stand in front of our school because no events happened. Even my worst friend would have harmed himself before harming another. That is what defines one who reads the *Risale-i Nur*. At our school the *Risale* was read. I always give this example. Ours was the only school in [my hometown] at which such events didn't happen.[63]

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[62] Yasemin (2:00)

[63] Selim (49:30). For another comment on restraint from fighting see Berat (32:00) in Appendix B.

Selim is careful here to tie the distinction between his school and the other schools to the *Risale-i Nur*, to identify that those who read the *Risale* are indeed set apart by behavior without exception, to the extent that an entire school would be handled differently because of the influence of the *Risale* on the student population.

Eda likewise asserts a very definite distinction between her behaviors and those of other university students who do not read the *Risale*. She explains how her father, who does not read the *Risale* himself, has noted the difference between her and other young people her age:

> When [my father] sees the atmosphere at universities or of various groups, it is very important to him that we [his children] are this put together, that we haven't lost our values, that we are aware of things. My father saw raising children in a big city like a nightmare. He was right; to raise the kind of children he wanted was difficult. But with the *Risale*, when he saw us being trained up with it, when he saw it affecting our lives, my dad was really happy. […] For my father, we have become ideal people. […] We show him respect; we are the kind of people he wanted [us to be]. We don't have any bad habits, like cigarettes or alcohol. […] He says he owes a lot to the *Risale*.[64]

Thus, while it might seem to an outside observer that the overt signals and signs, the first category of dichotomization, serves to provide more obvious, clear lines between those who are included and those who are excluded from the *Nur* movement, the perspective of the students themselves indicates the reverse. For the adherents of the movement, that which most distinguishes them from outsiders, that which establishes and maintains the borders between a *Nur* adherent and a non-adherent, is not so much their language or their outward appearance but rather their basic value orientations. Though both of these categories help to form their group identity vis-à-vis the excluded other, the second of the two receives far more emphasis.

4.3.2 Nur Students and Adherents of Other Islamic Groups

While some of the distinctions identified in the previous section on dichotomization may also apply to the boundary of group identity between the *Nur* movement and other Islamic movements, like the use of the terminology in the

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[64] Eda (3:15). For a similar observation from Berat's father see Berat (2:00) in Appendix B.

Risale or perhaps the presence of "*nur*" on the face of adherents, much of what was discussed above would encompass both *Nur* students and followers of other Islamic movements. Thus the problem of determining the boundaries between the *Nur* movement and other Islamic groups remains. Eriksen clarifies that when speaking of group identity there are levels of complexity which cannot be addressed simply in terms of "us" and "them," or "*Nur* student" and "non-*Nur* student" as was outlined above. While there are those who fit neatly into one of these two categories without complication, many fall much closer to an "almost like ourselves" classification than an "extremely different from us" one,[65] complicating boundary definition in that the degree of similarity is high and that of difference is low. One such group is constituted of the members of other Islamic movements. The boundaries between them and the *Nur* movement cannot be determined using the more overt and tangible methods of distinction between "us" and "them" discussed in the previous section, though some of those may indeed be relevant. Such determination requires, instead, a consideration of degrees. While *Nur* students and students of other Islamic groups may seem similar in many respects, the extent to which they practice or embrace a given perspective helps to highlight the points of divergence. It is largely a matter of emphasis. We may, therefore, attempt to sketch this boundary more precisely below by considering that which the *Nur* movement emphasizes more strongly than other Islamic groups. Before proceeding to delineate these divergences, however, the *emic* perspective requires that we should dwell briefly upon the ways in which they converge.

4.3.2.1 The Nur Movement and Other Islamic Groups: "We are the same."

Before any of the *Nur* students would begin to discuss that which distinguished them from other Islamic groups, they were always diligent to assert that the basic foundations of their identities were the same; that is, they placed the

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[65]Eriksen (1993) employs these two phrases when discussing the complexity of identity and boundary formation in multi-ethnic environments. He proceeds to discuss that in such complex environments us and them distinctions may be either ambiguous or clear-cut, giving each the following title: "When such principles of exclusion and inclusion allow for differences of degree, we may call them *analogic*. They do not encourage the formation of unambiguous, clear-cut boundaries. When, on the contrary, systems of classification operate on an unambiguous inclusion/exclusion basis where all outsiders are regarded as 'more or less the same', they may be spoken of as *digital* (Eriksen, 1993: 67). The boundaries discussed in this study should be understood as analogic.

other Islamic groups firmly in the "almost like ourselves" category. It was very clear from the interviewees that they did not want to in any way separate themselves from Islam as a whole and thus they adamantly invoked the similarities to maintain their affiliation with the unified Islamic community. Emre expresses this continuity with the whole of Islam as being grounded in the homogeneity of their basic beliefs:

> The most basic *Risale-i Nur talebe's* beliefs are the same as Islam. There is nothing basic that separates them. There is not a difference with a *Risale-i Nur talebe*. It is not different from being a Muslim. Only being a *talebe* means that you have read the *Risale* and have learned something from it that you try to follow in your own life. If I were to define it as something, it is Islam (*Islamdır, yani*).[66]

Emre equates being a *Nur* student and being a Muslim based on the continuity of belief; it is, according to him, simply Islam. Berat likewise sought to underscore the unity that the *Nur* group identity has with all Muslims when he stated: "Bediüzzaman, for example, said that we are a *cemaat* of 300 million people. The *cemaat* he was speaking of was all Muslims in the world, those who are living the way of Islam correctly."[67]

Not only was the link to Islam established in terms of the similarity of beliefs and the unity of the Muslim community, but care was also taken to identify the connection between the *Risale-i Nur* and the Koran. Cemal refers to the *Risale* as a "translation" of the Koran;[68] Meltem describes it as an "interpretation" (*tefsir*)[69] and Eda asserts that "reading the *Risale* is like reading the Koran; they are not separate."[70] The intimate tie between the *Risale* and the Koran was stressed by all of the interviewees, and usually with fervor. Fatih described the connection with an illustration: "If we think of the *Risale-i Nur* as a sponge, when we squeeze it the drops which fall are the words of the Koran."[71] Thus, in embarking upon an attempt

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[66] Emre (21:45)

[67] Berat (11:45)

[68] Cemal (2:45)

[69] Meltem (4:00)

[70] Eda (1:01:15)

[71] Fatih (21:30). For other examples of the articulated connection between the *Risale* and the Koran see Emre (15:45) and Yasemin (1:00) in Appendix B.

to distinguish between the *Nur* movement and other Muslims, one must keep ever in mind that, from the perspective of the adherents of the movement, such demarcations must always be qualified by their unity with the whole of Islam in terms of beliefs, community and text.[72]

4.3.2.2 Emphasis #1: The Mind

Perhaps the most frequently articulated point of divergence between the *Nur* movement and other Islamic movements was the emphasis *Nur* students place upon the mind. This focus on the use of one's intellect was contrasted by the interviewees with two other approaches found among other Muslim groups: first, a focus on the practice of Islam, but a practice which lacked investigation, and second, a focus on the heart.

One of the students interviewed, Demir, helped to delineate this boundary based on rationalization by establishing a dichotomy between two kinds of Islamic faith. The first is he referred to as imitative (*taklidi*) faith and described people who have such faith as follows: "They see it and do it, not understanding it but choosing to do it because another does it, without thinking. Because his mother and father are Muslims, he is Muslim. It is not a conscious (*şuurlu*) Islam and faith."[73] In contrast to this type of faith, he explains that there is investigative (*tahkiki*) faith, which he defines as "[understanding] the path taught by the Koran and the Prophet with a person's own mind, his own thoughts. […] It is a method of proving faith with your intellect."[74] Demir later attributes this *tahkiki* faith to the *Nur* movement, asserting that Bediüzzaman brought about such an emphasis through the method of study he employs and encourages in the *Risale-i Nur*. Demir understands this to be a source of distinction between it and other movements.

An excerpt from the interview with Selim may help to clarify what *tahkiki* faith looks like in more practical terms. Though Selim does not utilize these specific

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[72] For another comment on why there need not be this separation into various groups within Islam, see Yasemin (16:15) in Appendix B.

[73] Demir (8:15)

[74] Demir (9:00)

words, he likewise sets apart the *Nur* movement on the basis of investigative faith, giving several examples of the type of questions a person with this faith would ask:

> *Risale-i Nur* students believe in that which is necessary for all Muslims: God is one; *Hazreti* Mohammed was a servant, an ambassador, and a prophet. These things everyone accepts. Next to this there are also the following questions: The prophets were sent, I wonder why they were sent? Or, God created us, what does he want from us? We [*Nur* students] think about these things.[75]

According to Selim, the *Nur* students comply with the basic tenets of the Islamic faith but, in addition also ask questions in order to investigate and understand that faith on a rational level. Thus, without severing any ties to Islam, as is in keeping with the "almost like ourselves" designation, the *Nur* students distinguish themselves from other Muslims and other Islamic groups in their emphasis on engaging intellectually in their faith.

This stress on an intellectual engagement in one's faith also surfaces vis-à-vis an engagement of the heart. The *Nur* students mainly attributed an emphasis on the heart or the emotional aspects of faith to various religious orders (*tarikatlar*) in Turkey, including the Sufis and Nakşibendis, while identifying themselves as concentrating on the mind. This is not to say that there is an absolute opposition and that the *Nur* students only practice their faith with their minds and not with their emotions or vice-versa. Rather, it indicates an order of preference, as Ahmet explains:

> People [in *tarikats*] seek to better themselves in the path of Islam more with their hearts. The *Risale-i Nur* is not like this. It moves forward with the mind and the heart together, let's say. Truly it is important. To learn something with logic and from there continue, believing and living. But first it must start with the mind. And after that the heart comes in, both together; never only the mind or only the heart.[76]

Ahmet is careful to specify that one is never to proceed in faith without the heart, but rather that the emotional aspect of faith must follow after logical belief. Thus, for students of the *Risale-i Nur*, a faith based upon rational comprehension, as opposed to a faith centered either on imitative practice or on emotion, is of primary

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[75] Selim (8:00)

[76] Ahmet (13:15). For a further comment on the distinction between a faith focused on the mind and that focused on the heart see Demir (30:15) in Appendix B.

importance. This emphasis serves not only to distinguish the perimeter between them and other Muslims and religious orders, but is also foundational in shaping the group identity in other ways. For example, the organization of the movement centers on discussion groups (*sohbetler*) at which students meet to discuss and debate together the meaning of various passages in the *Risale*. Such a structure exists because the necessity of grasping belief logically takes precedence over other forms of worship or practices of faith.

4.3.2.3 Emphasis #2: Social Life

The characterization of other Islamic groups, particularly *tarikats,* as those who focus on the heart also leads to a second important boundary marker between them and the *Nur* movement. One of the ramifications, according to Demir, of an emphasis on the emotional aspect of faith is a tendency to isolate oneself and worship God alone. He describes the life of those who concentrate on the heart side of faith as follows: "They do not enter social life; rather they withdraw and leave everything behind. The main norm [of this heart-focused faith] is leaving (*terk etmek*); leaving everything outside of God and trying to establish worship with God alone."[77] As Demir proceeds to explain, this is not the life style chosen by a *Nur* student:

> Bediüzzaman, however, encouraged a complete entry into social life. He says our duty is not leaving. Bediüzzaman had this preference because he believed that this was also the Prophet's main consideration. The matter taught by the Koran and the Prophet is not to leave; it is [on the contrary] precisely to be with other people, to be found in every position in social life. It is, without leaving anything, to leave the world spiritually. It is not making any concessions regarding religion or God's commands and words while, at the same time, doing the world's work for God's approval.[78]

In the above passage Demir makes a very important point with respect to the *Nur* student's engagement in worldly activities which must be kept in view. This involvement in social life should not be interpreted as embracing the world; the world should still be "left" on a spiritual level. As Demir identifies, the focus remains on God. Indeed, the "world's work" which a *Nur* student accomplishes is to

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[77] Demir (30:30)

[78] Demir (31:00)

be done "for God's approval." The dichotomy is not, therefore, either leaving or embracing the world, but rather whether to leave the world in a social or a spiritual sense. According to Demir, those involved in *tarikats* have left the world on both planes whereas a *Nur* student only leaves on the spiritual one. Directly following the passage quoted above, Demir identifies this contrast in leaving as "the biggest difference" between the *Nur* movement and other Islamic groups.

Selim likewise found entry into social life to be of crucial importance in defining the life of a *Nur* student, though his understanding centered not on accomplishing the "world's work for God's approval" but rather on God's work that needs to be done in the world. Thus, for Selim, being active in the lives of those around him is a means by which to help to save their faith. Given that, in his opinion, this is the main goal of the *Risale-i Nur*, a *Nur* student must be involved in social life:

> In a society if everyone is a Muslim, if everyone is a good Muslim […] then no one needs to put effort into saving faith because everyone is a believer already. What shall we do? Let's get a little bit closer to God. Let's isolate ourselves from the world. *Tarikats* are like that; they have their own way of thinking. But in the *Risale-i Nur* there is this thought: my faith has been saved but now save others' because those who don't have faith, according to our beliefs, go directly to hell. […] The *Risale-i Nur* is aimed at saving faith. For that reason it is more active, more social. But *tarikats* are a little bit more closed in on themselves.[79]

Thus, while Selim differentiates the same boundary between the Muslim religious orders and the *Nur* movement, i.e. the degree of one's involvement in social life, he does so with a different emphasis. For him the dichotomy is not only about leaving and isolation versus activity but also about whether or not one is concerned with saving the faith of others.[80] Thus, while the extent of one's activity on a social level may be taken as a significant boundary between the *Nur* movement and other Islamic groups, it must also be noted that the conceptualization of this distinction among the *Nur* students is various.

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[79] Selim (28:00)

[80] For another comment on this distinction between focusing on those who already believe versus those who don't yet believe, see Ahmet (14:00) in Appendix B.

4.3.2.4 Emphasis #3: Politics

The third and final emphasis which, according to some of the interviewees, differentiates the *Nur* students from other Islamic groups is also the most contentious: the issue of involvement in politics. This is a question we will return to at length in the following section regarding the boundaries between smaller sub-groups within the *Nur* movement, which hints at its controversial nature. Within the *Nur* movement itself there are many different views regarding whether or not one should enter into politics. Thus, to establish this as a boundary between the *Nur* movement and other Islamic groups is actually quite problematic, as some ascribe to this boundary and others deny it. Nonetheless, because those who ascribe to it do so very adamantly, seeing it as an essential distinguishing characteristic of the *Nur* movement, it must be taken up here. However, I do so with the qualification that many within the *Nur* movement would not agree with this as a demarcation point.

For those who do contend that a lack of involvement in politics differentiates the *Nur* movement from other Islamic movements, they do so absolutely, allowing for no middle ground. For them, the issue is black and white: the *Nur* movement does not affiliate itself with politics. Ahmet expresses it simply that, "*Nurcu*s should not be involved in politics. […] I can say that politics is definitely forbidden."[81] This unqualified retreat from politics, for Ahmet, helps to define the identity of the group. It likewise does so for Demir, whose statement below sketches this dividing line even more explicitly:

> The most important difference [with respect to other Muslim *cemaat*s] is the movement having no connection with politics. Bediüzzaman himself says, 'what is the difference between us and other Muslims who have faith? They are also working for Islam; may God approve of them. However, they are doing it with politics, they have political aims. We don't have any such aim (*gaye*). We are only working for the salvation of people's faith.' The most important difference is this.[82]

It is interesting to note in this passage that in addition to distancing the *Nur* movement from politics, it also asserts an alternative purpose: the salvation of people's faith. The implication, therefore, is that politics does not further the

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[81] Ahmet (32:00)

[82] Demir (16:00)

salvation of faith and thereby must be avoided. This goal coincides quite nicely with the aims of the movement expressed in the previous section with regard to social life and the importance of working toward saving the faith of others. Such consistency is reassuring for an analyst, helping one to feel as if there is a core to the group identity which can be discovered and studied. (The reality of the many discrepancies within the movement itself to be addressed shortly is less so.) Nonetheless, at this point, it may be asserted that one of the central elements of the *Nur* movement identity is a desire to spread Islam and save the faith of others. Indeed, even those who advocate political involvement express this goal, though their methods are admittedly different. Berat is one who endorses activity in the political sphere for reasons which will be addressed in the subsequent section, but he also professes that the spread of Islam is one of the primary purposes of the *Nur* movement: "The essential goal is for everyone to be God's and, in the other world, to go to heaven. For that reason, the goal is not to get people in the movement, but to explain Islam to people."[83] Berat also makes a significant clarification in this excerpt. While the aim is the spread of Islam, the salvation of the faith of others, that does not translate into a desire for a larger following of the movement itself. The movement, in this conceptualization, is not the end but a means by which to explain Islam and bring people to God.

Thus, in defining the boundaries between the *Nur* movement and other Islamic groups in Turkey, at least two unqualified contentions may be made regarding its group identity: first, it is a movement which focuses on a rational understanding of faith and, second, it desires the spread of Islam, not the movement, through various means including an intentional involvement in social life and, for some, a retreat from politics.

4.3.3 Boundaries Within the Nur Movement Itself

If the previous two considerations of the *Nur* movement's boundaries with the excluded other may be conceptualized as concentric circles, with the outermost boundaries lying between the *Nur* student and the non-*Nur* student, and within that another circle which delineates the perimeter between the *Nur* movement and other

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[83] Berat (45:15)

Islamic groups, then the following section comprises the innermost and smallest of the concentric circles, the boundaries that exist between different sub-groups within the *Nur* movement itself. Looking once again to Eriksen for a framework through which to consider the divisions within this inner circle, the differentiations within the movement may best be understood in the context of that which he terms "fission." A definition of fission and the manner in which the interviews reveal it as having taken place within the movement will be considered at length below, followed by a discussion of the boundaries which separate these fissured groups. First however, as was the case with the previous section, the *emic* perspective insists upon a reminder that there is a general resistance among many of the *Nur* students to admit to or endorse the categorization of the movement into various sub-groups.

4.3.3.1 Resistance to Acknowledge Division

Several of the *Nur* students I interviewed were quite concerned with emphasizing the unity that exists within the movement. While all acknowledged multiple leaders within the movement on some level, some did not agree that this represented a division within the group. Cemal explained his perspective on this issue in the following manner:

> They [the various sub-groups] are all students of the *Risale-i Nur*. […] Which is easier, for one person to explain something to 1000 or for that one person to explain it to ten people and those ten people explain it to 1000? [*Nur*si's] relatives and those who loved him, they worked together [in this way] but there is nothing like a separation. […] If someone makes such a separation, I am suspicious of him. I am suspicious of his religion. There is only one thing: if you say that there is only one God and that Mohammed is His prophet, that's it. […] What happens if there are groups inside of a *cemaat*? The group will scatter.[84]

From Cemal's standpoint, therefore, there are indeed several different people explaining the *Risale-i Nur* but this does not constitute a separation within the movement but rather an effort at efficiency arising from necessity. Indeed, Cemal, who invokes the unity present under the Islamic statement of faith ("there is only one God and Mohammed is His prophet"), questions the very religion of an

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[84] Cemal (27:30)

individual who would identify such a separation. For him, unity is at the heart of Islam and disunity threatens its demise.[85]

Eda likewise resists the division of the movement into various groups by maintaining that all have the same relationship to the *Risale-i Nur* as readers and students:

> Separating is not necessary. I think within the *Nur* movement there isn't anything like that, actually. Everyone is a *Risale* reader, everyone is a student […] There is no grouping, everyone is a student. This is something perceived by those on the outside who do not know, those who are not inside. [To them] it seems as if there are groups.[86]

For Eda, this separation into sub-groups is something done by those outside the movement, those who do not understand it from an insider's angle. This could present a significant problem for one who wishes to consider the boundaries between these various groups from the *emic* perspective, if indeed said perspective admits no such boundaries. This was not, however, the unanimous *emic* perspective. Other interviewees, to varying degrees, identified points of divergence between the various groups.[87] Thus we may proceed to a discussion of those identified distinctions, keeping in mind, however, that not all the *Nur* students would be comfortable with that which follows.

4.3.3.2 Fission and the Nur Movement

The process of fission, as defined by Eriksen, is the reduction of the size of a group which presumably shares the same ancestors. He offers the following explanation of the process:

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[85] Please refer to the discussion regarding the ramifications of utilizing the *emic* perspective and my role as an interviewer and analyst in influencing that perspective in Chapter 3 (3.3). In brief, my identity as a female, American, Christian interviewer may have influenced the degree to which some interviewees were comfortable recognizing different groups within the movement or indeed within Islam at all.

[86] Eda (29:15)

[87] It is interesting to note here based on my limited pool of interviewees that there seemed to be a general trend for those affiliated with the Gülen *cemaat* to be much less likely to acknowledge significant differences within the *Nur* movement, or to do so always with the qualification that in the end the goals and purposes were the same. Those from other groups, however, or those who did not consider themselves part of any particular group at all, spoke more readily of the distinguishing points between sub-groups.

A common sociological term for this kind of process is 'fission'. At the levels of ideology and personal identity, it can be expressed through a shallowing of genealogies. Instead of tracing one's group origins back to, say, Adam or Noah, one may thus trace it back to one of their respective sons (or to a more recent ancestor—compare the 'twelve tribes of Israel') and thereby argue the validity of present ethnic boundaries. (Eriksen, 1993: 69)

Eriksen's conceptualization refers to the splitting of an ethnic group through its identification with a later generation which creates a sort of "shallowing of genealogies" resulting in the separation into validated, distinct ethnic groups. When considering this process in reference to the *Nur* movement Bediüzzaman could be taken as the primary "ancestor" and the subsequent divisions which result from the fission process may be seen as occurring along the lines of his various students who took on the leadership of the movement after his death. While this process of fission in the *Nur* movement is not total,[88] as the *Nur* students still ultimately refer back to Nursi and the *Risale-i Nur* as their primary source of group identity, its presence is nonetheless notable in the way that the *Nur* students discuss the divisions that have taken place, describing them in terms with coincide very closely with this fission process. See, for example, the following excerpt from the interview with Ahmet:

The *cemaat*s also separate within themselves for different reasons. […] Let me explain how that happened. When Bediüzzaman was alive everyone thought of him as the leader whether he wanted it or not because no matter how much he said that the *Risale-i Nur* was the essential thing and that all the rules are written within it, there was still the aura of a leader about him. [After his death] as different people were traveling to various places and introducing the *Risale-i Nur*, they became familiar first of all Bediüzzaman and the *Risale-i Nur* but whenever there was a question the people slowly started to ask it to the person who had come to them. So some people began to gather around one person, some around another and some around another and in this way the *cemaat*s began.[89]

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[88] Another factor which makes this process of fission incomplete is that there are some who do not affiliate themselves with any particular sub-group at all, still calling only upon Bediüzzaman as their "ancestor" figure. Demir is one such student and explains it in the following manner: "There are many like me who are not connected to a certain *cemaat* or group, but who define themselves as *Risale-i Nur talebes*. Because the *cemaat*s put on some pressure, unfortunately, in relation to their own work. We are a little bit more freedom-lovers (*hürriyetçi*). […] We are not in a *cemaat* but consider ourselves *Risale-i Nur talebes*." (Demir (2:00)).

[89] Ahmet (21:00)

Ahmet, in the proceeding passage, attributes the separation between groups within the *Nur* movement as being the result of people beginning to lean, not upon Nursi himself, but upon the interpretation or opinion of one of his students, his "sons," if you will, thus causing the process of fission to occur. Emre cites a similar process in his understanding of how the divisions originally came about in the *Nur* movement. He states, "The *Nur cemaat* actually came about later, after *Usta* died. […] Maybe this is just what happens, as the numbers increase, like I said there are different people, certain people go this way and certain people go that way. People prefer one [of Nursi's students] or the other."[90] Thus Emre likewise sees the divisions as resulting from a dispersion of Nursi's followers among his various students after his passing. People began to consider not only Nursi's opinions but, increasingly, that of one of his particular followers as well.

That many of the *Nur* students articulate these divisions in a manner consistent with fission processes is significant for a couple of reasons. First, the formation of sub-groups on such a basis leads one to assume that these divisions are fairly permanent in nature as the adherents, while acknowledging Nursi himself, also call upon an individual further along in the *Nur* "genealogy." The possibility of these adherents returning to Nursi as their sole ancestral unit seems highly unlikely. More probable is the continued division based on ever-more recent "sons" of Nursi. Second, such a conceptualization of the manner of the splits also lends a sense of justification to each of the sub-groups in that they believe that the student of Nursi whom they follow is the one who interpreted Nursi's intents and desires correctly. Berat identifies this trend among the various students of Nursi, stating: "There were students of *Usta*. After he died, each of these students interpreted how to spread the *Risale-i Nur* into the whole world in different manners. Each of them presented a different way in which they thought they should proceed; each of them saying that *Usta* wanted them to do it this way."[91] Thus, the fact that the differentiation between groups within the *Nur* movement centered on fission-like developments is highly influential in determining both their permanence and the nature of their interaction with one another. We will return to this idea of permanence in the final

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[90] Emre (27:30)

[91] Berat (16:30)

section on boundary characteristics. Having determined the manner in which the divisions within the *Nur* movement occurred, we may now turn to consider those issues which maintain their distinction. The boundaries between the various groups within the *Nur* movement, according to the interviewees, revolve around two basic matters: their attitudes toward the *Risale-i Nur* and toward politics.[92]

4.3.3.3 Attitudes Toward the Risale-i Nur

Perhaps the most widely accepted and often-noted distinction between sub-groups according to the interviewees is based on their attitude toward the *Risale-i Nur*. Questions such as how the text should be handled, to what extent it should be read vis-à-vis other works, and to what degree it should be strictly followed or adapted to the needs of the day all surface as boundary markers between the various groups. I will not attempt here to take up each of the groups and identify their attitude toward the *Risale* as my interest does not lie in such a categorization nor does the limited scope of my research allow for such an overview. Rather, I will consider each of these questions and look at the ways in which the answers to them vary, creating distinction in both the identity and the function of the different sub-groups.

When addressing the handling of the *Risale*, the most common difference noted by the interviewees is that between those who read the *Risale* (*okuyucular*) and those who write it (*yazıcılar*).[93] The interviewees noted this as a distinction which emerged due to the need to produce and distribute copies of the *Risale* at a

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[92] A third issue which one of the *Nur* students, Berat, saw as a dividing line was the question of exclusivity. He understood some groups in the *Nur* movement to be very exclusive in nature, only allowing certain types of people to enter. By contrast he views the Gülen group as being significantly more inclusive. See Berat (17:00) in Appendix B. I have chosen not to include this boundary in the main discussion given both that it was only identified by one student and that it was only distinguishing one group, the Gülen movement, from all of the others. Those issues I have chosen to focus on, the attitudes toward the *Risale* and toward politics, are much more encompassing in nature. It is also interesting to note that, in establishing the boundaries as based on the text of the *Risale* and on politics, the interviewees concur closely with the sources of difference between sub-groups identified by Metin Karabaşoğlu (2003) and M. Hakan Yavuz (2003, "*Nur* Study Circles"), as discussed in Chapter Two. Please refer to section 2.3, "The *Nur* Movement after Nursi," for a full explanation of Karabaşoğlu's and Yavuz's arguments in this regard.

[93] I did not have the opportunity to speak with any *Nur* students who identified themselves as "writers." They are apparently small in number and I was unable to find an interviewee through my personal connections. This, undoubtedly, affects the perspective of the group presented above.

time when it could not be done with a printing press. Most identified the "writers" as a very small group which persists today, though their work, according to the interviewees, is no longer necessary since the printed *Risale* is readily available. As an analyst, this distinction between "readers" and "writers" struck me as perhaps a means by which to admit no distinction at all. Given the apparently small size of the "writers" group and the way in which the interviewees placed the root of the difference in the past, the usefulness of this separation proved limited in understanding the dynamics of the majority of the sub-groups today. For example, Eda places this boundary firmly in the past by saying, "Of course there would be different groups [in the past]. One person would write, one person would read, one person would take these books to another city. The groups were present at that time; now I do not think there is an important separation into groups. I have not observed a group separation like that."[94] Thus, though the distinction between "readers" and "writers" does in fact continue and though it is the most commonly referred to by the interviewees, it seems to be emphasized in lieu of an acknowledgement of more recent and more numerically significant differences within the *Nur* movement. While the boundary it creates should not be overlooked, it should be seen not as the primary division within the movement, as it is often portrayed, but rather as one aspect of the divergences which result from the attitudes various sub-groups adopt toward the *Risale* as a text.

Another distinction which centers on the handling of the *Risale*, and which is perhaps more relevant to the boundary separating a larger portion of the *Nur* population, likewise poises the "readers" on one side. Opposite the "readers" in this case, however, is not the "writers" but those who focus on the spread of the *Risale*. Berat notes this dichotomy in the following passage:

> For example there is a group called the readers. In just one day they read hundreds of pages of the *Risale-i Nur*. They cannot read any other books. Their way is also correct. They value deeply studying [the *Risale*]. They only see understanding the *Risale-i Nur* and changing themselves as important. They are not very concerned with the proliferation of it. However, from the perspective of the Fethullah Gülen group, spreading it is essential. For that reason there are different groups.[95]

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[94] Eda (30:00)

[95] Berat (18:45)

Berat cites a difference between those who give attention to the reading of the *Risale* and those who concentrate on its proliferation, finding the difference to stem from an emphasis on personal growth and development versus an emphasis on reaching others. It is interesting to note that this in many ways echoes the difference discussed previously regarding the divergent foci between other Islamic groups and the *Nur* movement, a similarity which underlines that what is really at issue here is a question of degree. Obviously, those who proliferate the *Risale* also read it and those who read it are also interested in sharing it with others; the issue is which takes precedence.

Ahmet, himself a "reader,"[96] would fervently disagree with Berat's assessment of the "readers" versus the Gülen group's focus on the spreading of the *Risale*. While he, too, sees the extent to which a sub-group seeks to spread the *Risale* as an important boundary marker, he has the opposite opinion regarding the Gülen movement's record in this respect: "The most essential thing is the reading and spreading [of the *Risale*], but for Fethullahcılar the spreading of the *Zaman* newspaper or the *Sizinti* magazine is more important. This kind of work is being done. This is not a pleasing thing in the name of the *Risale-i Nur*."[97] Whichever perspective of the "readers" and the Gülen movement one chooses to endorse is irrelevant. In either case, the boundary is being drawn based on the same criteria. The distinction here is the extent to which one focuses on the proliferation of the *Risale* and the way in which that focus alters how time, energy and other resources are spent.

In a similar fashion, much is also made of the extent to which the *Risale* is read vis-à-vis other works, be they the writings of other Islamic thinkers, others within the *Nur* movement (such as Gülen) or secular works of science, philosophy or history. For example, while Berat argues that both the works of Gülen and the *Risale* should be read in tandem (though he is careful to place the *Risale* above

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[96] Ahmet describes some of the ways in which the *cemaat* he is a part of focus on reading the *Risale*. He states, "During free times for students, in the semester breaks or over the summer break, or for those who work at a time when it is suitable for all of them, some small programs are done, seven or ten or twenty or five or three days, however long you are free. We close the houses and only read from morning until evening, we read the book [the *Risale*], the Koran; we pray together and have discussions" (Ahmet (30:30)).

[97] Ahmet (34:15)

Gülen's writings),[98] Selim doesn't see the value in reading Gülen when the *Risale* is the essential matter:

> Hocaefendi's books are daily (*günlük*). They were written in daily language. For a man who reads the *Risale-i Nur*, those books seem a bit simplistic (*sade*). They don't seem different from normal books. […] I read the *Risale*; I don't read Hocaefendi's books because he writes them from the *Risale*, kind of like a summary. The *Risale* has a wider scope. When I have the source (*memba*) why would I go to those? In our [*cemaat*] house Hocaefendi's books are not read.[99]

Selim identifies refraining from reading the works of Gülen as one of the conventions of his *cemaat* house. The attitude toward the *Risale* adopted by Selim's *cemaat*, that it is primary to the extent that other works need not/should not be read, differentiates it from other sub-groups within the *Nur* movement.

There is a similar distinction made with regard to various secular writings. Though all of those interviewed were students and therefore were involved in reading for their classes, the extent to which they placed value on the knowledge of secular sources or the writings of other Islamic scholars emerged as a discriminating factor. Demir speaks of the importance he places on all kinds of knowledge in contrast to some others within the *Nur* movement:

> If a person knows the old works [which Nursi himself had read and refers to in the writing of the *Risale*] he can better understand what is being talked about. I think to understand better you need to know them, both the old books and the new knowledge. For example, as a student of politics, I understand some topics better because Bediüzzaman himself read political [works], philosophy, probably Aristotle, Plato, etc. I can understand these topics better. Next to this, I also think that reading the older knowledge, the *hadiths*, interpretations (*tefsir*) from other Islamic scholars, is very beneficial. Although there are those who believe that it is not necessary to read these other sources. There are those who only read the *Risale*.[100]

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[98] Berat perceives this balance of both the *Risale* and Gülen's writings as being important, as he states in the following passage: "The essential thing is the *Risale-i Nur*. As I said, Fethullah Gülen speaks in order for the *Risale* to be understood. He takes the things in the *Risale* and explains them using a lighter (*daha hafif*), a more understandable language. However, the essential thing to read is the *Risale*. If we read both the *Risale* and Fethullah Gülen, we both get what we should from the *Risale*, and, for the things we didn't get, with Fethullah Gülen we can understand them more easily. […] Both of them should be read, I think" (Berat (51:15)).

[99] Selim (37:45)

[100] Demir (24:30)

Thus Demir likewise identifies the degree to which a particular sub-group emphasizes the reading of the *Risale* in balance with other works as a way in which to discern it from another.

One final attitude toward the *Risale* which apparently varies according to the respective sub-group is the extent to which they follow it strictly or adapt it as necessary to the situations which arise in daily life. Demir addresses this issue specifically with respect to the Gülen movement. While he finds the results of their works to be, overall, positive, he does take issue with their flexibility in areas that he regards to be foundational to the *Risale-i Nur*. He states,

> They [the Gülen movement] are doing beneficial work and generally following the lessons and methods of the *Risale-i Nur*. However, some of their activities don't follow [the *Risale*]. For example, in their schools they give permission for their female teachers to uncover their heads. Bediüzzaman probably wouldn't have done this. For a person who reads the *Risale* such a pragmatic choice [is not in keeping with the *Risale*].[101]

From Demir's perspective, religious codes and the values promoted in the *Risale* must always take precedence over more practical considerations and the extent to which this approach is endorsed sets apart one sub-group from another.[102]

Thus the way in which a particular group views the *Risale* is one crucial aspect of boundary creation within the *Nur* movement. This includes the emphasis they place alternatively on writing, reading or spreading the *Risale*, the rank they give to the *Risale* in comparison to other works in their reading times and the degree to which they interpret the *Risale* strictly as it is written or with flexibility in light of the demands of our time. The importance of the way a sub-group regards and interprets the *Risale* is heightened further because it substantially influences the second major boundary marker between the sub-groups, their attitudes toward

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[101] Demir (35:00). Demir also expressed that the Gülen followers' endorsement of Atatürk constituted a significant deviation from Bediüzzaman's perspective: "Not directly Hocaefendi, but those who follow him, respond to Mustafa Kemal like this: however much they don't like him personally, they appear as Atatürkçus. This is not very compatible with Bediüzzaman's perspective" (Demir (39:45)).

[102] Demir shared a story from his own life when his religious convictions outweighed pragmatic considerations. One of his final exams was scheduled during the Friday prayer time. He approached his professor and asked if a change could be made so that he could attend prayers and the exam. When the professor said no, Demir chose to go to prayers. Though an obviously conscientious and capable student, he decided to miss the exam and thereby fail the course. He did not adopt a more practical or pragmatic approach but chose to strictly follow his religious beliefs.

politics. As was discussed in Chapter 2, Said Nursi himself had very definite opinions regarding political involvement in the New Said period, the period in which he wrote the bulk of the *Risale*; therefore, the way one views the *Risale* also impacts the way one views politics and serves to demarcate all the more definitely the differences between groups.

4.3.3.4 Attitudes Toward Politics

Although all of the *Nur* groups have read the *Risale-i Nur* and understand Nursi's hard stance against politics following his transformation into the New Said, how they interpret it with respect to their own situations varies greatly. Some categorically oppose any involvement whatsoever as contrary to the *Nur* movement, including even the reading of newspapers and engaging in informal political discussions among friends, while others argue that there are justifications for political involvement given the present circumstances. Some also seek to forge a middle ground between the two extremes, identifying both the necessity as well as the shortcomings of an active political life.

Similar to Ahmet and Demir's explicit denouncement of political involvement cited in the section on the boundaries with other Islamic groups above, Selim and the *cemaat* he is a part of likewise do not engage in political activity of any kind. Moreover, he understands this to be the most basic dividing line between various groups within the *Nur* movement; there is, he claims, a dichotomy between those who advocate political involvement and those who don't:

> The different groups are a result of *Usta's talebeler*. Some entered into politics, some didn't enter. In that way they became different. There are those who are involved in politics and those who aren't. […] There are two different groups from my perspective. They [other groups] read newspapers, they watch television when necessary. But with us there aren't those things. We only read the *Risale-i Nur*.[103]

Selim suggests that the differences between groups may have stemmed, not from their different interpretations of the *Risale* as I indicated above, but initially from their choice of whether or not to enter into politics. It could, therefore, be argued that the distinction between the groups started, not with fundamentally different

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[103] Selim (30:30)

interpretations of the *Risale* and how one should approach it, but rather with political involvement. This engagement in the political sphere later determined the way in which one interpreted the *Risale*. More important for the purposes of this study than determining whether political or textual differences came first, however, is the acknowledgement that they are intertwined and that they are both vital for understanding the perimeters established between *Nur* movement sub-groups.

On the opposite side of the coin are those who encourage political involvement. Though they recognize that Nursi strongly urged an avoidance of politics, they maintain that Nursi's reasons do not apply to their situations.[104] Yasemin, for example, has recently become involved in the youth branch of the Justice and Development Party (JDP/AKP) via an invitation. She perceives this opportunity as having been placed in front of her by God and as a means by which she can improve herself. In her opinion, the reason
Nursi encouraged people to flee from politics was because of the danger of ambition, a danger by which she does not currently feel threatened:

> The general reason to stay far away from politics is if a person is chasing after a position. Many people are like that but I don't have any expectation for that kind of thing. That's not important at all. In the end I am trying to improve myself in various ways. I am also trying to improve myself with a civil society establishment. Politics is the same way; it is an opportunity for me. I don't have any expectation for myself, for my name. Right now there is nothing like that. For that reason I don't see politics as a threat for me right now.[105]

Indeed, not only is politics not dangerous according to Yasemin as long as one does not have ambition for a particular position, but she later argues that it is quite important for the movement. She states that it is "important to show you have strength and to be able to accomplish some things, to do some things. It can't be

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[104] Berat likewise justifies involvement in politics by arguing that the reason Nursi discouraged it was the danger of two Muslim brothers becoming enemies as a result of being in different political parties. Berat, however, maintains that it does not have to be this way and, if that is the case, then political involvement is acceptable: "There is a fear of entering politics for this reason. Because we are going to do politics in our country and it seems that we will be enemies with people in other parties. […]But if a [new] party is founded, all the people in this party will be united in the work, and if they can show that their basic goal is the good of the country and to correctly represent the country then there is nothing wrong with being involved in politics" (Berat (26:30)).

[105] Yasemin (59:00)

done without politics (*siyaset olmadan olmaz*), without political strength."[106] Thus, for some in the *Nur* movement, politics is not only benign, it is important to accomplish their goals. This realization helps underscore the polarization between those who enter politics and those who don't which Selim spoke of above. While some perceive it as antithetical to the *Nur* movement, others see it as vital. Such a distinction indicates not only different opinions with respect to politics or with respect to methods of achieving their aims, but possibly different aims altogether. This is a crucial point with respect to the characteristic of these boundaries, to be addressed at length in the following section.

There are also those *Nur* students who recognized both the advantages and the downfalls of activity in the political sphere. Eda, for example, expresses a view of politics which takes into account both its positive and negative aspects:

> I think politics is a necessary thing, […] but you must know what it is. *Usta* compares it to chess. In order to move a castle or a horse, you have to use the pawns. He says that politics is like that. In order for the strong people to get to a certain place, in order to be able to do something, they crush the people in front of them. That seemed very logical to me. But politics is also a big strength. […] For that reason, in the future I think I will become involved in politics.[107]

Given the spectrum of opinions regarding politics, therefore, and the various interpretations of why it may present a danger, it is not surprising that it has become a major determining factor in boundary establishment and maintenance within the *Nur* movement. One can only assume that, if the trends continue with some becoming involved in politics and others refusing to read the newspaper, the dichotomy of the sub-groups within the *Nur* movement will become even more pronounced. The nature of these and the other boundaries discussed above, including this question of the extent to which they are fixed and will remain intact, will be further considered in the following section.

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[106] Yasemin (60:15)

[107] Eda (54:45)

4.3.4 Boundary Characteristics: Fixed vs. Fluid, Open vs. Closed

The above consideration of the boundaries demarcating various divisions between those both inside and outside the *Nur* movement may have given the impression that these lines are definite, definable and static, when in reality most possess none of these qualities. Though the above study attempted to determine some of the ways in which perimeters are erected and maintained in respect to three different concentric circles, it would be erroneous to assume that all of the potential boundaries were addressed or that those addressed are necessarily fixed. Thus, let us pause briefly here and, by way of conclusion, consider the nature of the boundaries defined above.

As mentioned in Chapter 2, Şerif Mardin describes the boundaries delineating the *Nur* movement as being "diffuse," (Mardin, 1989: 26) because there is no definitive organizational structure or membership protocol by which one may determine who is "in" and who is "out." The *Nur* students in their interviews confirmed Mardin's assessment, identifying the boundaries as fluid, ambiguous, and, according to some, non-existent. Emre, for example, extends the boundaries of the *Nur* movement outwards to encompass anyone who has belief in God and does not behave with animosity toward Bediüzzaman:

> *Usta* does not separate people saying you are in or you are out. His definition is much more agreeable. The people [in his group] are many. Everyone who is a Muslim, moreover not even just Muslims, anyone who believes, who calls themselves a believer is included; only belief in God and obvious other things are required. Christians, in my opinion, are within the group. […] It is enough not to speak poorly of [Nursi], not to be an enemy of him.[108]

While the boundaries determined by Emre seem wide and flexible, Eda's perspective is even more so as she asserts that there are no such boundaries at all: "The *Nur cemaat* or *Nurculuk*, it doesn't exist. There is no wall (*duvar*). There is a wide perspective. It looks very widely at the world; it has a very wide view."[109] It should be noted here that the boundaries being discussed by both Emre and Eda are those which determine whether a person is within the *Nur* movement or not, i.e. the

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[108] Emre (2:15)

[109] Eda (22:15)

boundaries of the two outer concentric circles. Those boundaries are apparently quite fluid and expansive.

I have argued above, however, that the boundaries dividing the groups within the *Nur* movement, the innermost circle, possess a greater degree of permanence both given the means by which they were established through the process of fission, a process which it would be difficult to reverse, and given the way in which the dividing lines may in fact delineate very divergent goals. These sub-group boundaries seem more often to represent a polarization of ideas that place an individual in one of two mutually exclusive camps. That is not to say that the boundaries between these sub-groups are not permeable. Indeed, they are quite open to traffic across them, as will be discussed below. Nonetheless, I would contend that the boundaries of a sub-group within the *Nur* movement are much more rigid than those which determine whether one is in the *Nur* movement at all. While the outermost border may be extended to include all who are Muslims, or even all who believe in God, and the second circle's border may expand to include any who utilize rational thinking when approaching religion or who embrace involvement in social life,[110] most of the borders delimiting the sub-groups do not possess the same expansive quality. A sub-group which does not believe in the practice of politics cannot expand to encompass those who do, nor can a sub-group which endorses the reading of only the *Risale* widen to embrace those who read all different materials. Many of the boundaries of this innermost circle differ from those of the outer two in that they separate, not only degrees of emphasis, though that is sometimes the case, but also polarized positions and will thereby, I argue, persist.

When it comes to the degree to which these three circles of boundaries are open or closed, however, all appear to possess the same permeability in that all are open to considerable traffic. With regard to the outermost boundary, that between the adherent and non-adherent of the *Nur* movement, Berat expresses the movement's porous nature as follows, "Anyone who wants to enter may enter. No

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[110] The boundary between other Islamic groups and the *Nur* movement which is based on political involvement would possess the same rigidity as those of the inner-most circle. However, given that not all *Nur* students endorse said boundary, one can still be a member of the *Nur* movement according to many and practice politics. Thus this boundary retains its fluid status.

one can be told not to come or to leave."[111] The open invitation for new *Nur* movement adherents thus constitutes an open outer border. The same is true of the boundary between the *Nur* movement and other Islamic groups in Turkey. Ahmet indicates the freedom of movement over these perimeters in this way, "We do not believe [the *Nur* movement] is something different from Islam. It is a wide street. Let me say this, someone who is interested or involved in another *tarikat* or *cemaat* can still come and receive light from the *Risale-i Nur* even without rejecting their own paths. It is that wide of a space."[112] A similar mobility was cited by Emre with regard to the interaction between the sub-groups within the *Nur* movement itself. He identifies himself as continuously crossing such borders: "There may be several *cemaat*s with specific names but me, for example, I meet with people from all different *cemaat*s. I know all of them."[113] There seems, thus, to be a general understanding from the *emic* perspective that a boundary marker does not communicate, "you may not cross here," but rather may be penetrated at will. The boundaries at all levels may be characterized as open.

The boundaries outlined above, most of which are fluid though some are characterized by rigidity and all of which are open, serve as a means by which to conceptualize the group identity of the *Nur* movement. As boundaries are negotiated at each level of the three concentric circles, not only is the movement itself and the various sub-groups within the movement re-shaping their identity vis-à-vis the excluded other, these negotiations also impact the identities of the individuals involved in the movement. The ways in which being a part of the *Nur* movement affects the identity of the individual *Nur* students and the means by which they themselves negotiate the boundary between their individual self and the others around them will be taken up in the following chapter.

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[111] Berat (43:15)

[112] Ahmet (12:00)

[113] Emre (29:15). For a similar comment regarding the permeability of the sub-group boundaries see Ahmet (22:00) in Appendix B.

CHAPTER 5

INDIVIDUAL IDENTITY

The second aspect of identity which must be addressed in reference to the *Nur* movement in Turkey is that of the individuals involved. In accordance with the previously defined concept of identity, that of the individual must also be understood as one which is shaped, defined and negotiated in relationship. On the individual level, the external other for *Nur* students, against which identity formation occurs, is comprised of two different sets of people: those who are outside of the *Nur* group (the "outside other") and those who are within it (the "inside other"). Both sets of external others must be seen as impacting how the individual perceives herself in reference to the *Nur* movement and thus both will be taken into account in what follows. Furthermore, as argued in Chapter Three, the nature of the *Nur* movement as an intimate, personal, religious movement requires that consideration also be given to internal processes of self-definition which occur in relation to the religious text, not to other people. These internal transformations will therefore be addressed at the conclusion of this chapter.

The ensuing study of individual identity will be conceived in light of Richard Jenkins' internal-external dialectic model by which there is a continual "synthesis of (internal) self-definition and the (external) definitions of oneself offered by others" (Jenkins, 1996: 20). Thus, as each of the two external others is addressed, an attempt will be made to consider this process of synthesis by looking at whether the individual accepts or rejects the external definitions of the self offered by these others and the ways in which these may be said to impact internal self-definition. This is, as was mentioned in Chapter Three, in many respects a modified form of Barth's boundary model employed in the previous chapter, in that the individual identity is determined at the border of the self and the other. Barth's conception of

how group membership may be said to impact interaction and identity formation at the boundary with each of these two external others will therefore be incorporated into the discussion which follows.

5.1 Individual Identity and the "Outside Other"

The way in which a *Nur* students presents himself to an external other, one who is outside of the *Nur* movement, be it a friend, a family member, an acquaintance or a stranger, sheds considerable light on his sense of self-identity and the way in which he negotiates that identity presentation based upon his audience. Undoubtedly his membership in the *Nur* movement affects this interaction with the "outside other." The question is in what ways and to what extent this may be the case. Barth asserts that group membership "canalizes social life" in that it "entails a frequently quite complex organization of behaviour and social relations" (Barth, 1969: 15). Such canalization is easily observable in the way in which the *Nur* students discussed their interaction with the outside other. For example, the way that they portray their involvement in the *Nur* movement to family and friends, the difficulties they perceive as coming from the outside other as a result of this involvement and the way in which they discuss, or choose not to discuss, Nursi and the *Risale-i Nur* all indicate an awareness of a specific mode of interaction which is appropriate to employ with those not ascribing to the same group or movement. Barth asserts that the separation of others as being in a different group from the self affects behavior and social relations in three distinct fashions: "[A] dichotomization of others as strangers, as members of another ethnic group, implies [1] a recognition of limitations on shared understandings, [2] differences in criteria for judgment of value and performance, and [3] a restriction of interaction to sectors of assumed common understanding and mutual interest" (Barth, 1969: 15). In assessing the interaction of the *Nur* students with the "outside other" and the way in which this contact both reveals and determines individual identity, the discussion will be

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formatted to coincide with the first and third of Barth's three modes of canalization cited above.[114]

5.1.1 Recognition of Limitations

The first of Barth's assertions of the way in which dichotomization based on group membership affects interaction, and by extension individual identity formation, is that it creates a "recognition of limitations on shared understandings." The *Nur* students expressed an awareness that the shared understandings between them and "outside others" are limited, articulating this particularly in discussing their relationships with non-*Nur* adherent friends. When asking them if they identified themselves as a *Nur* student to their friends outside of the movement, most expressed that it greatly depended upon the friend. There were friends who were more understanding and sympathetic or interested in their beliefs and with those friends they spoke more openly about this aspect of their selfhood. With others, however, the topic was left untouched. Ahmet explains how he assesses before speaking about his *Nur* student identity whether or not an individual will respond in a friendly manner:

> When speaking of friends, there are many who know and many who do not know [that I am a *Nur* student]. I have friends from very different sides. Some are serious Communists. To those people I do not say anything. But normally if there is someone who I am friendly with and they ask, I will tell them without being embarrassed. If they are someone I can explain it to, if they are someone who is not going to come against me in any way; then I am not shy.[115]

When Ahmet determines that the limitation on shared understandings is too extreme, as with his committed Communist friends, he chooses not to speak of the *Nur* aspect of his identity through a process of situationally-based negotiation. Berat expresses a similar process of negotiation in his relationships with his friends, saying that he readily shares with those who are "religious" or who are "not opposed to religion." With those who are "against religious people," on the other hand, he is more

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[114] The second mode of canalization cited by Barth, "differences in criteria for judgment of value and performance," may be identified in the following discussion on value prescription and the "inside other" in 5.2.1.

[115] Ahmet (1:06:00)

cautious.[116] The way in which these young men do or do not identify themselves to their friends as *Nur* students reveals an awareness of the limitations on their shared understanding with the "outside other."

The same recognition of difference may be noted in the way some *Nur* students speak of their identity in relation to strangers who are part of the "outside other" category. Eda, for example, tells the story of interactions she has had with strangers on the city bus when they see her reading the *Risale-i Nur*:

> On a bus there are many people who will enter into conversations [about the *Risale*] with me. I am not covered, I am one of them.   When a woman sees the book in my hands she turns and asks at what I am reading. 'Don't read that, my daughter,' she says. Can you imagine? But those kind of reactions don't bother me. I say, 'Have you ever read it?' It is a preconception, they haven't read it. 'Ok,' [I say], 'then, first you read it, then you can make a judgment, then we can talk.'[117]

It is interesting to note in what Eda relays here that, from her perception, people are willing to approach her because they presume that she is like them, that she is "one of them" because she does not cover her head. However, at the point at which they see what it is she is reading, the walls of difference are erected and Eda feels from that moment how limited their shared understanding is. Once she has identified herself by what she is reading as a *Nur* student, the awareness of difference between herself and the "outside other" is acute.

Not all *Nur* students feel as comfortable as Eda in asserting their *Nur* identity in public, among strangers. Selim, for example, is very aware of the limited shared understanding he has with those around him and therefore does not identify himself with the group readily in such a situation. He explains that,

> At necessary times I will say [that I am a *Nur* student] but I will not open the *Risale* everywhere and read it because this can be misunderstood. People say that you probably don't read anything besides that. People think that way and that is bad.[118]

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[116] To read the passage from which these phrases were taken in its entirety see Berat (41:00) in Appendix B.

[117] Eda (41:45)

[118] Selim (13:15)

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Selim, very aware of the assumptions and the disapproval of those around him, only articulates his *Nur* student identity when it is necessary. The external has significantly tempered his willingness to identify himself with the *Risale* in public.

Returning to Jenkins' concept of the synthesis of the internal-external dialectic, the awareness of limited shared understandings between *Nur* students and "outside others" influences individual identity. There seems to be a strong sense among the *Nur* students that in certain settings and among certain people, being a *Nur* student is not acceptable. Therefore they negotiate identity and employ tactics of under-communication so as to present an acceptable self to the external. That is not to say that they consistently hide their identity. Eda, for example, reads the *Risale* openly on public buses. At the same time, however, she chooses not to cover her head and one of her reasons for this is the preconceptions of others when they see a covered woman. Thus, even those who are more willing to associate themselves with the *Risale* in public are also caught in the web of identity negotiation. They, as *Nur* students, are constantly processing the degree to which their shared understandings with an "outside other" are limited and articulating their identity in accordance with their perception of the external's probable reaction.

One important exception to this is when the "outside other" falls within the realm of the student's immediate family. Though half of the interviewees' families were affiliated with the *Nur* movement themselves, the other half were not. The *Nur* students did not express the same tendencies toward identity negotiation and under-communication within the family unit, however, even when their families could be placed firmly in the "outside other" category. On the contrary, the families of the *Nur* students seemed not only to accept their identity, but indeed to embrace it, expressing gratefulness for the role of the *Risale* and the *Nur* movement in the lives of their children. For example, Eda's father does not read the Koran, as mentioned in Chapter Four, but he feels that he owes a great debt to the *Risale* because of the ways in which she is moral and respectful, an "ideal" person, due largely to its influence.[119] Indeed, her father has repeatedly suggested the *Risale* to others around him based on her experience; he tells others to "definitely have your children read

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[119] For full quotation see Eda (3:15) in Appendix B.

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[the *Risale*],"[120] though he himself does not read it. Berat's father is likewise thankful for the influence of the *cemaat* school's in his son's life, citing Berat's respectful attitude as stemming from his involvement with the *Nur* movement.[121]

Selim's father was quite uncertain about his son's involvement in the *Nur* movement initially and asked Selim if he could come and visit the *cemaat* house in which Selim lives. After staying there one week, his father's opinion had changed. According to Selim, his father's reaction was as follows: "My father was amazed (*çok hayran kaldı*). When he looked at my friends he saw how respectful they are, he said, 'They are gentlemen (*efendiler*). Now I am not going to worry about you. Your friends are very good.'"[122] Apparently after this experience, and seeing the ways the *Risale* had impacted his son's life in other areas too, such as spending money wisely, Selim's father has started to see the *Nur* movement in a much more positive light. Indeed, he himself has begun reading the *Risale* and attending the discussion groups (*sohbet*). Thus, the response of the "outside other" within the family unit is overwhelmingly positive and encourages rather than dampens the communication of the *Nur* identity.

This exception in the *Nur* students' perceptions of how they are viewed by the external should be understood as a significant one in light of the internal-external dialectic. Perhaps most importantly it raises the question of whether, within said dialectic, all externals are equal. If, due to a different response from their families, the *Nur* students felt compelled to negotiate their identities at home or in situations of familial contact in the same way in which they do with the "outside others" discussed above, one may presume that the synthesis of individual identity would look markedly different than it does in the present situation. Given the way it currently stands, there seems to be a progressive willingness to communicate their *Nur* student identity as an aspect of their individual identity based on the degree of intimacy of a relationship. With a stranger or in public, the least intimate of all relationships, many of the students expressed the necessity to under-communicate the *Nur* movement aspect of their identity. On the friend level, which is one step

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[120] Eda (4:15)

[121] For the full quotation see Berat (2:00) in Appendix B.

[122] Selim (15:00)

closer in terms of intimacy than strangers or acquaintances, negotiation still exists but not in all of the relationships. With some they feel the comfort to affiliate themselves openly with the *Nur* movement. In the most intimate of relationships, their family relationships, all of the *Nur* students interviewed articulated their *Nur* identity freely and openly and with quite positive results. Were the situation reversed, one may assume that the synthesis of the external with the internal would be a much more conflictual process.

5.1.2 Restriction of Interaction

The formation of individual identity via contact with the external, and specifically with the "outside other" not only affects the extent to which one chooses to articulate her identity but also influences other forms of interaction between the two. With regard to the *Nur* students, I was especially interested in the way in which the internal-external dialectic of identity formation impacted the way or extent to which they shared the lessons of the *Risale* with others around them. In which situations and in what fashion did they feel that they could, not only identify themselves with the *Nur* movement, but also try to convince others of the virtues of their perspective? Conversely, in what ways did they feel restricted in these interactions? Such questions bring us to the third of Barth's assertions regarding the ramifications of separating oneself and the other into various groups: the restriction of interaction to areas of assumed understanding. According to Barth, the dichotomization which results from identifying oneself as inside a group and another individual as outside of it not only requires the recognition of the limitations on shared understanding, as discussed above, but also constrains interaction with those outside others, confining it to those things which are considered common ground. This dynamic of restricted interaction between the internal and external was also observable in the interviews with the *Nur* students, particularly in the context of sharing the *Risale*'s teachings.

Yasemin, for example, speaks of the way in which she broaches the sharing of the *Risale* with those around her as follows:

> At the beginning, the starting point is important. You can't just plop it down in front of them. First it is important to warm up your friend, to explain, to teach, to show them with examples. First you yourself are an example, as a

good Muslim […] [Until they ask] how did you become a good person like this? You must raise their curiosity. […] [Afterwards] they begin to ask us questions. It gets easier.[123]

Rather than laying it all out before them from the beginning, Yasemin first focuses on acting out the *Risale* in her own life, on being an example for them. At the same time, she restricts herself from speaking about the *Risale* itself until the other's curiosity has been raised and they begin to ask her questions. In doing so, she establishes a foundation of common ground between herself and the other person, expanding, through the things the "outside other" can observe and experience in her life, their area of assumed understanding. Yasemin works to remove the restrictions that must otherwise determine their interaction and, once she has done so, as she states, "it gets easier." The ease comes when the area of understanding is wide enough that their interaction no longer need be restricted by the differences which separate them into inside and outside of the group.

Fatih also touches upon the necessity of restricted interaction based on the inside-outside dichotomy. He indicates a need to restrict interaction, at least initially, to those areas of assumed understanding. Thus, while he may communicate the messages or beliefs of the *Risale* to those around him, he does so without referring to it by name:

> On this point I want to say this, we don't share much with the people around us (*çevre*). Why don't we share it? […] Why can't we explain it very much? We can't say it under the name of the *Risale*. For example, we can't explain it like, Said Nursi says this. Why? Because in Turkey there are some people who have preconceptions about this subject. […] For that reason, under the name of the *Risale* we don't say anything. But with some friends we try to share the basic messages of belief and worship with those around us without using the name very much.[124]

In communicating the essence of the message without utilizing the name of Nursi or the *Risale*, Fatih succeeds in precluding the difficulties which could result from venturing beyond the areas of assumed understanding. While belief and worship, depending on the "outside other," may be considered topics of common ground, the attitudes he and the "outside other" hold toward Nursi and the *Risale* are clearly,

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[123] Yasemin (50:45)

[124] Fatih (8:30)

from Fatih's view, not the same. Thus, he restricts his interaction with the outside other to speaking about those areas which will not create division.[125]

This brief consideration of the restriction of interaction which surfaces due to the dichotomization of being either within or outside of the *Nur* movement is enlightening with respect to individual identity. If individual identity is created at the boundary of self and other through a process of synthesizing the internal self-definitions and externally supplied definitions, the above excerpts from Yasemin and Fatih provide important information about that process. They indicate, first of all, what the *Nur* students perceive those externally supplied definitions to be. Fatih and Yasemin both imply that the "outside other" does not have a positive view of Nursi or the *Risale-i Nur* and, thus, avenues must be taken to avoid offending based on these names. For Yasemin, that means forming a common ground through relationship which allows space for re-definition. For Fatih, it means restricting his speech so as to avoid utilizing those terms and thereby trying to maintain an already established area of assumed understanding. In both cases it is clear that they feel a need to somehow alter their approach so as to accommodate the negative assumptions held by the "outside other." Secondly, these two passages also highlight the extent to which the externally supplied definitions do indeed impact their individual identity. Neither feels the freedom to ignore the opinions of the "outside other" and simply assert their own identity based on self-definition. Both, rather, clearly expressed a desire to interact in such a way as to respond to and alleviate the tension between their self-definitions and the externally produced ones.

Thus, in the sense that dichotomization creates both recognition of limitations on shared understanding and restrictions on interactions, the fact that an individual is a member of the *Nur* movement and thereby separates himself from those who are not, impacts his individual identity in significant ways, encouraging processes of negotiation and restriction with the external. These processes, it could be argued, cause the rise of significant tension in the synthesis of the self as the desire to balance and accommodate both the internal and the external proves difficult. One may conclude that membership within the *Nur* movement, in light of

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[125] Selim offers a similar explanation of the way he interacts with the outside other, not speaking just of the *Risale* itself but rather sharing it through his own personal experiences in ways that the other may relate to, such as taking an exam. For this passage see Selim (11:30) in Appendix B.

the relationship it creates with the "outside other," increases the difficulty in forming a comfortable and consistent individual identity. Rather one's sense of self is in constant flux, responding alternatively, and indeed simultaneously, to the demands of the internal and the external, as is implied with Jenkins' dialectic model.

5.2 Individual Identity and the "Inside Other"

Further complicating the issue of individual identity formation is the reality that the external is not simply composed of the "outside other" with which the individual is in a constant state of compromise. The external also consists of the "inside other," i.e. those who are within the *Nur* movement but are external to the self. The "inside other" too demands its part in the synthesis of individual identity. Indeed, the "inside other" not only seeks to shape individual identity, but also strives to mold the way in which she responds to the "outside other," complicating the matter greatly. Barth refers to this tendency by noting the constraints placed on an individual due to his identification with a group: "Common to all these systems is the principle that ethnic identity implies a series of constraints on the kinds of roles an individual is allowed to play, and the partners he may choose for different kinds of transactions" (Barth, 1969: 17). Thus the "inside other" reserves the right to constrain the individual in respect to their interaction with the external both in terms of roles and partners. Barth's statement proves fitting in considering the values the *Nur* movement endeavors to prescribe for its followers, values which, if internalized, would place constraints on an individual's roles and on their partners.

5.2.1 Value Prescription

An individual's interaction with the external is largely shaped by the values they hold, values which are determined, much like identity, by a negotiation between internal and external pressures. One of the primary ways in which the "inside other" differs from the "outside other" is the greater sway which it holds in prescribing an individual's values in various areas. With regard to the *Nur* movement as the "inside other," I am particularly interested in the values which it encourages which are not inherent to Islam, though obviously it endorses many inherent values as well. However, some of the values which the *Nur* movement aspires to are not necessarily

"Muslim values," though they may be couched in those terms, but are rather priorities established apart from, yet not in conflict with, Islam. These fall into four categories: politics, education, nationalism and the West. These four themes were also the focal point of Chapter Two in that they comprised important areas of emphasis for Nursi himself. Each category will be addressed below, first briefly reviewing the values which, given Nursi's life and writings, one would expect a *Nur* student to hold and then utilizing the interviews to ascertain the extent to which these values have been internalized by the *Nur* students.

5.2.1.1 Politics

As the *Nur* student perspectives on politics have been considered at length in Chapter Four, this category will be given only short attention here. As may be recalled from Nursi's biography (see Chapter Two), his life was divided into three different periods, the Old Said, the New Said and the Third Said, all of which corresponded, along with other things, to distinct views regarding politics. He was most heavily involved in politics during the Old Said period given both the company that he kept and his endorsement of constitutionalism and freedom during the early years of the twentieth century. The bulk of his writings, however, were accomplished in the New Said and Third Said periods when he was more reticent to involve himself in the political fray. Indeed, during the most prolific period of his writing career, the New Said period, he was adamantly opposed to political involvement. As a result, the value most often communicated by the *Nur* movement with regard to politics is one of restriction, or in Barth's words, a constraint "on the kinds of roles an individual is allowed to play." The majority of Nursi's writings clearly state that his followers should remain far away from politics; political involvement is not to be their role.

The *Nur* students have various interpretations of why Nursi urged them to maintain a distance from politics. In the discussion on politics in Chapter Four assorted interpretations surfaced in the interviews cited, including the following: politics may remove the focus from the sole purpose of the movement to save

faith,[126] politics may encourage selfish ambition,[127] and politics may involve the crushing of weaker people (pawns) in order to be able to accomplish a goal.[128] The interviews not discussed in Chapter Four reveal numerous other interpretations of this constraint as well. Fatih, for example, argues that politics must be avoided because of the web of lies in which it potentially entangles a person: "Because politics can be full of lies, *Usta* did not like it much. It wasn't without lies. Because lies in our religion are an abominable (*kerih*) thing, it is necessary that we not say them. For that reason, we try to stay away from politics."[129] Emre perceives the main issue in Nursi's avoidance of politics to be the fighting that can ensue between two Muslim brothers because of ascribing to different political parties:

> "If two people believe the same things and love one another, but for political reasons you are on opposite sides, you may say the other is bad or wrong. It means that in politics there is something that makes people who believe the same things tear each other to pieces. Because *Usta* saw this he stayed far away and warned the people around him not to enter politics."[130]

Though the understandings of Nursi's reasoning are diverse, there is no question that avoiding politics is one of the values clearly communicated by the *Nur* movement.

This does not, however, necessarily correspond to an internalization of this value by the *Nur* students. There are many who, while acknowledging that political disengagement is a high value of the *Nur* movement, choose not to abide by it in their personal lives. Rather than denying the existence of this value, they provide justifications for why their situation validates a different course of action, why they are allowed to play the constrained role. For example, Emre, quoted above, identified the potential for fighting between Muslims as a reason Nursi encouraged others to maintain a distance from politics. However, just after making this observation, Emre provided a justification for why this value need not necessarily

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[126] See the discussion of Demir's comment, Demir (16:00), under the sub-heading "Emphasis #3: Politics" in Chapter Four (4.3.2.4).

[127] See Yasemin's explanation, Yasemin (59:00), under the sub-heading "Attitudes Toward Politics" in Chapter Four (4.3.3.4).

[128] See Eda's comment, Eda (54:45), under the sub-heading "Attitudes Toward Politics" in Chapter Four (4.3.3.4).

[129] Fatih (33:00)

[130] Emre (36:00)

apply today. He explains, "Of course, in my opinion, that period of time [Bediüzzaman's time] and this one are different. If he had written at this time, if he had been involved in politics at this time, it would have been different."[131] Yasemin likewise provided a validation of her political participation, as noted in Chapter Four, by arguing that she was not prone to ambition and therefore politics was not dangerous for her. These examples indicate that though the value is manifestly communicated, it is only partially internalized. Only some of the *Nur* adherents conform to this role constraint. The significance of this observation will be addressed in the section on value internalization below.

5.2.1.2 Education

A second area in which the "inside other" seeks to influence the attitudes of the individual *Nur* students is that of education. Rather than seeking to constrain a role or partner, however, this value encourages a role, the role of active involvement in learning. As discussed in Chapter Two, Nursi attributed great significance to education throughout his life. He worked to establish the Medrestü'z-Zehrâ university in the East and was resolute in his pursuit of educational reform which would encompass both the Islamic and the secular sciences. Though his attitude toward materialistic philosophy changed with his transformation from the Old Said to the New Said, at which time he became disenchanted with it and focused himself more devotedly on the study of the Koran, he nonetheless maintained his conviction that the secular sciences aside from philosophy should be studied in tandem with Islam and that education itself was indispensable. The interviews demonstrate that Nursi's values with regard to education, perhaps more than in any of the other three areas discussed here, have been on the whole adopted by the *Nur* students.

All of the interviewees expressed a high value for education, though, as was the case with the question of political involvement, their reasons for why education was important were variable. One particularly scholarly young man, Demir, expressed the need to grasp the foundational ideas of the past which continue to influence and shape intellectual thought today:

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[131] Emre (36:30). For another comment regarding the potential fighting between Muslims in politics and a subsequent justification for why that should not preclude involvement, see Berat (25:00) in Appendix B.

It is beneficial for a person to understand things like: what is a state, what is power (*iktidar*), power relations, and Marx's theory. Understanding these is very important because people shape their ideas around these things. To understand what Rousseau thought or what Marx thought is very important in order to study today. It is necessary to know the significant ideas from the past.[132]

For Demir, a student of political science at one of Turkey's best universities, the importance of education stems from a desire to acquire knowledge and to be able to situate himself and what he studies into the history of thought. It is, one might say, education for education's sake.

Other *Nur* students connect the value of education much more closely to Islam. For Emre, a chemistry student, education and Islam are intertwined:

A Muslim definitely cannot separate himself from knowledge/enlightenment (*ilim*). To be a Muslim means to have knowledge (*ilim demek Müslüman demek*). It is required […] *Usta* asked why it was that during the Ottoman Empire the Muslims were behind. Was it because they were Muslims? He answers that it has nothing to do with that. There was a degeneration and people were not studying science. This appears to be because of Islam but actually that is not the case. It is completely the mistakes of the people [and their lack of knowledge]. […] Without knowledge/enlightenment there cannot be belief.[133]

According to this perspective, part of being a Muslim is acquiring knowledge and receiving an education. Another one of the interviewees, Berat who is studying political science, likewise tied the value of education to Islam. His focus, however, was less on its being a requirement and more on the importance of knowledge for the spread of the religion:

In order to spread Islam in this age education is a requirement. For that reason when this work began it began with education as the foundation. In our day uneducated people or people who are uninformed are not listened to. So for us education is a must. We don't ever educate ourselves in order to receive income in this world. It is only in order to spread Islam better and to show that Islam is not backwards.[134]

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[132] Demir (58:00)

[133] Emre (39:30). For a similar comment on the correlation between being a Muslim and having knowledge see Selim (58:00) in Appendix B.

[134] Berat (21:30)

Berat's statement is beneficial not only in highlighting the association he perceives between the spread of Islam and acquiring knowledge, but also in his clarification that the focus on education is not for personal financial gain or to in some way advance in this world. Rather it is solely for the sake of the religion.

Not all the *Nur* students were as single-minded as Berat, however. Meltem, for instance, viewed the value of education in a much more personal fashion. Having recently completed her undergraduate degree in film and radio, she now plans to complete her Master's degree abroad, in the United States. Meltem understands education to be a means by which to improve herself, though not only for her own gain but also for the benefit of others:

> After I complete my Master's, that should not be the end. Being educated will be a continuous process. […] [Education is] to improve yourself, to touch other people's lives in beneficial ways. In order to erase the possibility of being a person who doesn't accomplish anything and is on their own [isn't involved with others' lives], a person should get an education, should improve themselves and become a useful person.[135]

Because Meltem sees education as a means of self-betterment and of assisting others, she also understands it to be an unending affair which will continue to shape her life even after her formal education has finished. Thus, though the interpretations of education's significance are diverse, it was viewed by the interviewees, without exception, as possessing utmost importance and thus closely reflects the value Nursi himself placed upon it.

Even Nursi's renouncement of philosophy with the dawn of the New Said period, and his subsequent separation of it from the other branches of secular education, continues to reverberate in the attitudes of some *Nur* students. Ahmet explains why he does not see the study of philosophy to be as necessary as other types of knowledge:

> As for philosophy, not a lot of people can do it because there are very different ideas in philosophy. It is very hard to find truth in the midst of it. […] I have accepted the philosophy of Islam and the *Risale-i Nur*, which also has its own philosophy. Why do I need to read Freud on top of that? It seems that way to me. It is not necessary. A man explains one thousand things and ten of them are correct. 990 are wrong. Because, if he was going to find the truth, he would have been a Muslim; he would have accepted

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[135] Meltem (13:15)

Islam. […] When you look at it that way, it is normal that there are only a
few *Nurcus* studying philosophy, but those who are can be very
successful.[136]

Ahmet therefore echoes the bias of Nursi against philosophy, seeing it as containing
little and hard-to-find truth. This excerpt from Ahmet is also helpful in identifying
that, even though the study of philosophy was discouraged by Nursi, there are still
Nur students who engage in it. On a larger scale, this also serves as evidence that
Nur students are not necessarily directed or guided into one particular field of study,
as is sometimes assumed. I have heard many outside of the *Nur* movement contend
that *Nur* students usually study the natural sciences. This does not, however,
coincide with Nursi's call for students to be able to specialize in their area of
aptitude, as discussed in Chapter Two, nor does it seem to hold true among the
interviewees, who came from political science, economics, tourism, and film/radio
departments as well as some from the natural sciences. Indeed, Ahmet addresses
this issue a little bit later in his interview:

> There is nothing like, I am a *Nurcu* so I will study this, or I am a *Nurcu* so I
> will be a scientist. There is no border. This is completely chance. I have a
> friend who is a military commander. He also reads the *Risale-i Nur*; he is
> also a *Nurcu*. There are also those from business. They can do any job. At
> the schools there is no directing us into certain areas. But there is this,
> whatever you are studying you can use things from the *Risale-i Nur*.[137]

Thus, it may be asserted that any field of education is possible for a *Nur* student,
though there are some remnants of a prejudice against philosophy. More important
than what you study, it seems, is that you study at all. Education itself, and, as
Ahmet notes in the previous passage, the way one connects it to the teachings of the
Risale, are paramount values for the *Nur* movement. The extent to which these have
been internalized by the interviewees indicates that the "inside other" holds
significant sway in this area of their lives, defining the pursuit of knowledge to be
one of their expected roles.

One could argue, however, that the value of education upheld by the *Nur*
students is greatly influenced by factors unrelated to the *Nur* movement itself. All of

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[136] Ahmet (44:00)

[137] Ahmet (46:00)

the interviewees are themselves university students and thus, it could be contended, are simply adopting a perspective of education that is in accordance with their circumstances. Moreover, education is also a high cultural value; the focus of the Turkish culture on the necessity of education must also be taken into account in assessing the *Nur* movement's impact on the individual. In fact one of interviewees, Cemal, quoted Atatürk, not Nursi, in his explanation of why education is important. Cemal states, "Atatürk had a saying […] 'An educated enemy is better than an ignorant friend.' Education is required. Not just for Islam, but for a person to advance themselves."[138] Cemal's invocation of Atatürk indicates that education's value, if not originating in the cultural realm, is at least highly reinforced there.

I would still maintain, however, that the value placed on education by Nursi and the *Nur* movement, more so than the cultural value, affects the *Nur* students' attitudes toward it. One reason for this contention is the distinction that some of the interviewees draw between their own perspective on educational pursuits and those of their non-adherent friends. Ahmet asserts that the *Nur* movement's focus on studying is different from that which exists within the culture, as evidenced by the amount of reading that *Nur* students incorporate into their lives. He explains it in this way, "In fact I can say this, those who read the *Risale-i Nur* are the people in Turkey who read the most books. There are two groups of people who read the most books, one is the Communists; the other is the *Nurcus*. They are both very different but I can seriously say that the two groups that read the most books are these. Very few books are read in Turkey."[139] Thus, though the value on education does indeed exist within Turkish culture, those within the *Nur* movement seem to have been affected by this value to an unusual degree in their personal lives. This, it could be argued, is due to the considerable level at which the value of education promoted by Nursi has been personalized by the individual *Nur* students.

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[138] Cemal (31:15). It should be noted that Cemal was the only interviewee, not only in this context but in the course of all of the interviews, who appealed to Atatürk's authority. Most did not mention him and one did so in a disparaging fashion.

[139] Ahmet (41:45)

5.2.1.3 Nationalism

A prescribed approach toward nationalism constitutes the third value which the "inside other" strives to impart to the individuals in the *Nur* movement. In light of Barth's schema of the constriction of roles and partners, this third value may be seen as an attempt to constrict the extent to which the *Nur* adherents accept the nation-state as a partner. The *Nur* students' attitudes toward nationalism have been considered at length in Chapter Four under the study of "survival units" and thus this section will be brief. It is enlightening, however, to take up the issue again here, this time asking the question, to what extent do Nursi's and the *Nur* movement's values regarding Turkish nationalism influence the individual identities of the *Nur* students?

As outlined in Chapter Two, Nursi was concerned about nationalism on a couple of different accounts. First, he saw the divisive nature of nationalism as a means by which the West could gain dominance over weakened Muslims. He further viewed nationalism as an inferior basis for unity when compared to that afforded by Islam. There is some debate, however, whether Nursi's rejection of nationalism was total. Some understand his writings to permit an endorsement of a positive nationalism, which allowed for mutual assistance, solidarity, beneficial power and a stronger Islamic brotherhood, as contrasted with a negative nationalism which involved the swallowing of others and enmity toward those outside one's national categorization.[140] Others, like Camilla Nereid (1997), interpret Nursi's approach toward nationalism to have been one of full rejection, leading to various complications in the *Nur* movement's relationship to the nation-state.[141] Whether one accepts Nereid's interpretation or not, it is certain that if Nursi did endorse nationalism, it would never have been without significant qualifications and that he consistently viewed unification under Islam as superior to it.

The extent to which this hesitancy toward or rejection of nationalism materializes in the lives of the *Nur* students falls, as indicated in Chapter Four, on a broad spectrum. Some seem to embrace nationalism with unqualified enthusiasm;

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[140]The full quotation detailing Nursi's statement on positive and negative nationalism is given in Chapter Two (2.2.3)

[141] For a full review of Nereid's argument, see Chapter Two (2.2.3)

others neither accept nor reject it but rank it lower in importance than Islam; while a final group denies the necessity of the nation-state altogether and appeals to unity under Islam. Thus we see, as was the case with attitudes toward political involvement, there is a variable degree of internalization of Nursi's views of nationalism dependent largely upon the individual. Those who most strongly cherish nationalist sentiments and have thereby taken the nation-state as an acceptable partner may be said to have an extremely low level of internalization of this particular value, as under no interpretation could Nursi be said to completely endorse nationalist tendencies. Those falling into the other two groups correspond more closely with Nursi, and the discrepancies between their views could potentially be explained not by a different level of internalization by rather by their variant understandings of Nursi's perspective.

One aspect of nationalism not addressed with respect to the "survival unit" concept in Chapter Four is the distinction made by Nursi between a positive and a negative nationalism.[142] This distinction surfaces in a couple of the interviews as the *Nur* students themselves imply that nationalism can be of two different varieties. Cemal, for instance, qualifies his endorsement of nationalism in a way that indicates a separation between two different forms of nationalist fervor: "To be a good Turk, you should love your country, behave well for your country, make the things of your ancestors your own, but not say, "I am a nationalist" or look disparagingly at those on the outside."[143] Cemal's stipulation that nationalism should not cause one to look with disfavor on others seems to coincide with Nursi's warning that negative nationalism could provoke enmity against others and thus seems to represent an internalization of that positive/negative distinction. Ahmet's reflection of Nursi's thought is even more apparent as he actually utilizes the terms "positive" and "negative" in his discussion of nationalism, referring to positive nationalism as "suitable." Negative nationalism, on the other hand, he defines as that which says,

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[142] Nereid (1997) argues that this distinction is not accurate, that there are not two different "kinds" of nationalism, but that nationalism has two different "parts," a positive and negative (see 2.2.3). Nonetheless, here I will discuss this distinction between two "kinds" given that there appeared in the interviews such a conceptualization. I am not necessarily saying that Nursi intended for there to be two different nationalisms understood, rather that some of his followers have interpreted his writings in that manner.

[143] Cemal (33:00)

"I am the best; I am the highest."[144] This form of nationalism, according to Ahmet, is not acceptable. Cemal and Ahmet's comments indicate a high level of internalization regarding values associated with nationalism in that they echo the categorizations held in Nursi's own writings. Thus, despite some who avidly endorse nationalist thought and thereby constitute an exception, it seems that the majority of the *Nur* students do indeed internalize, if not the rejection, at least the hesitation toward nationalism expressed by Nursi and abide by the constraint on this partnership encouraged by their membership in the group.

5.2.1.4 The West

The final value to be taken up with regard to the "inside other's" influence on the individual is that of Nursi's attitude toward the West. This, like nationalism, may also be understood as an expression of a constraint on the acceptable partners with whom a *Nur* student may intermingle. As noted in Chapter Two, Nursi offers a staunch warning to his followers regarding Europe and the West.[145] He draws a strong contrast between the aspects of Europe which stem from the inspiration of true Christianity, labeling them the "positive" Europe, and those which derive from the darkness of the philosophy of Naturalism, deemed the "corrupt" or negative Europe. As Patrice C. Brodeur (2005) discovers in her review of these two Europes in Nursi's writings,[146] the negative Europe is spoken of far more often than the positive one. Nursi is wary of the potential influence of the corrupt Europe and clearly admonishes those who read the *Risale* to be on guard against its ideas. One such warning may be found in the "Second Station of the Seventeenth Word" where Nursi offers the following cautionary reproof:

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[144] Ahmet (54:00). Ahmet also seems to fuse Islam and the Turkish nation, seeing Turkishness as intertwined with Islam and defining Turkey as "an Islamic country," a "Muslim nation." For these passages see Ahmet (54:45) and Ahmet (1:00:00) in Appendix B. This perspective of Ahmet's corresponds closely with the following statement of Nursi's: "O Turkish brother! You should, more than anyone else, be careful! Your nationality is blended with Islam, being inseparable from it. If you separate them, you will be lost!" (Nursi, 1995: 139).

[145] Most of Nursi's discussions of the West are made with specific reference to Europe, which at the time of his writing represented the West far more than the United States. I take his comments regarding Europe as applicable to the West as a whole as it stands today.

[146]See Chapter 2 (2.2.4) for a more thorough discussion of Brodeur's research.

The one I'm addressing isn't Ziya Paşa, it's those enamored of Europe. The one speaking isn't my soul, it's my heart in the name of the students of the Qur'an. The previous words are all truth; beware, don't lose course, don't exceed their bounds! Don't heed the ideas of Europe and deviate, or they'll make you regret it![147]

It is thus quite clear that Nursi perceives danger in some European ideas, is unsettled by those who are captivated by its charms, and openly advises his followers to keep their distance.

Given the lucidity of Nursi's counsel regarding Europe, it is quite striking to observe no such qualms in the attitudes of the *Nur* students. Granted, they do see the *Risale-i Nur* as an important means of helping them to navigate how to live Islam in this day and age, as noted in Chapter Four.[148] But this does not appear to translate for them into a guide for how to approach the West, nor does there seem to be any sense of risk in engaging with it culturally, both through its exported products, including movies and music, and through studying abroad in the West.[149]

The interviewees indicated that they like foreign films and most of those who were able to choose a favorite film named an American movie (such as "Gladiator," "The Last Samurai," "Enemy of the State" or "Green Mile"). Their favorite music tended to be foreign as well, though many of them admitted that they were not avid music fans. They nonetheless tended to listen to foreign over local bands, or at least to both with equal frequency. Fatih did note that he has switched from foreign music to slower, instrumental and Sufi music since he graduated from high school, his reason being that he had "gotten more serious,"[150] but said that occasionally he will still listen to foreign songs. Only one interviewee, Selim, expressed any definite apprehension regarding these entertainment choices, his concern being that he continued to rely on music rather than prayer to calm him. There did seem to be an implication that his *abis* would rather he not listen to foreign music, and perhaps

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[147] Nursi (2004: 223).

[148] See Chapter Four, "The Emergence: Modernity and the Nur Movement" (4.1)

[149] It should be noted here that questions regarding movies, music, and studying abroad were not asked in the first two interviews. Thus this section derives its information only from the last eight. Questions regarding the European Union accession, to be considered later in this section on the West, were asked in all interviews.

[150] Fatih (50:45)

underlying that preference was an uneasiness about the importation of Western cultural values and norms, though this was certainly not directly articulated:

> I just started reading the *Risale* this year and some things have been hard for me to give up. […] The *abis* don't bother me about it. […] I listen to foreign music and I like some of the singers. For example, I will listen to Madonna. Turkish music is slow music. When you listen you will either miss your hometown, or if you love someone, you miss them. But foreign music isn't like that. It makes me want to listen. That comes from the weakness of my beliefs because for a Muslim peace (*huzur*) comes in prayer (*namaz*). For example, there is an *abi* who is 40 years old, in the *cemaat* in which I stay, he never listens to music; he has no need for it. He gets his peace in prayer. When he prays he is very happy and he isn't tense or irritable. Because I haven't been able to attain to that kind of spiritual life, unfortunately there are other things. For example, I listen to music to calm myself. Of course [the *abis*] give the recommendation to leave such music behind. They don't listen to it themselves. They find their peace in prayer. 'If I do that kind of thing, you can too,' they say.[151]

Apart from the slight implication in this statement by Selim that it would be better not to listen to foreign music, and even here he seems to be referring to all kinds of music, not just Western music, there was no indication on the part of the interviewees that the consumption of these Western cultural products might influence them in some negative way.

The interviewees likewise all expressed a past or current desire to study abroad and the locations of choice were, without fail, Europe or the United States. Some expressed willingness, when directly questioned, to go elsewhere as well, but priority always went to the West first. It should be noted that one of the primary reasons for studying abroad cited by many of the interviewees was a desire to learn language, as Fatih explains:

> After high school I really wanted to study abroad. I was going to go to Germany. My older brother is in England. First of all, we go to learn language. The best place is Europe, to learn language. In other places you can also learn it apparently. Someone was talking about how you can learn good English in Egypt. Middle Asia would also be possible to learn Russian. But Europe is always the first place.[152]

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[151] Selim (59:45)

[152] Fatih (49:45)

Thus, the desire to study abroad should not be interpreted as an eagerness to adopt the Western culture or, as Nursi states it, "to heed the ideas of Europe." It is instead a recognition of the advantages and opportunities of speaking a Western language well that motivates most of these young people. Even so, it is significant that the students express no reticence or hesitation to immerse themselves in the West given Nursi's strong caution regarding its perils.

Nur student perspectives on Turkey's potential European Union accession likewise revealed no reluctance to align with the West, to take the West as a partner. On the contrary, the students were overwhelmingly positive. Emre, for example, responds to the question with enthusiasm: "I think [entering the EU] would be great. […] It would open doors for travel, study and living abroad."[153] Some interviewees focused not only on the advantages membership held for Turkey but even more so on the potential benefits for Europe. Yasemin identifies what Turkey might offer the EU, emphasizing Europe's need for Turkey rather than vice-versa:

> Up until now [Turkey] has always worked to get into the European Union. The effort was always in that direction. But now it seems to me that the EU is getting older, that they will have needs for natural resources, for people power. It seems to me that they are going to need us.[154]

Not only will the EU need Turkey's resources and employment pool, but, according to Eda, they also need Turkey's position between East and West: "Maybe Turkey is going to be the biggest bridge between the East and the West. […] Actually, the EU needs us. As much as we need them, they need us."[155] Thus the *Nur* students, contrary to articulating any disinclination to join with the West in this fashion, instead seemed to express pride that Turkey might be pursued by the West based on her potential contributions.[156]

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[153] Emre (48:45)

[154] Yasemin (37:15). For a similar comment on Europe's need for Turkey see Cemal (36:45) in Appendix B.

[155] Eda (39:30). Yasemin likewise identifies Turkey's potential role as a bridge. See Yasemin (38:00) in Appendix B.

[156] There were also those who expressed doubt or uncertainty about Turkey's chances of accession. Notably Demir and Meltem both expressed this reservation. According to Meltem, this difficulty of acceptance stems from Turkey's status as a Muslim country. See Meltem (16:30) in Appendix B.

Membership in the EU was also viewed by some as an advantage for the cause of Islam. Berat articulates this perspective in the following excerpt:

> If you look at is from the perspective of a Muslim living in Turkey who wants to see Islam spread, then entering the European Union is a good thing, of course. Because then it will be possible for them to show the good attributes of Islam more easily. But if you look at the European Union from the perspective of, let's say, extreme Christians, or those working inside Christianity it is a bad thing because as you know this movement has expanded a great deal in a very short time. For that reason, the result of our entering the European Union will be that this expansion in Europe will occur faster.[157]

Berat not only views entry into the EU as a positive development for the spread of Islam, but, quite the opposite of Nursi, perceives in this fusion of cultures a threat for Christianity, not Islam. Rather than Berat expressing a need to be wary of the West's influence and potential to corrupt Turkey, he seems to imply that some in the West should be wary of Islam's expansion in Europe.

Thus, all of the *Nur* students, based on their statements, their willingness to consume Western cultural products, their desire to study in the West and their views on Turkey's EU accession, seem to give no heed to Nursi's repeated warnings regarding the West's negative side. They do not even mention such concerns, seeming both willing and eager, and not at all constrained, to partner with the West. Their level of internalization of this value seems to be almost non-existent.[158]

5.2.2 Value Internalization and the Efficacy of the "Inside Other"

The degree of internalization of the values in the four areas discussed above is thus indicative of the efficacy of the "inside other" in determining various aspects of an individual's identity and in constraining or encouraging certain roles and partners. Based on the, admittedly limited, data gathered by the interviews, education is the most widely accepted and internalized of the four values. This could be said to influence an individual's identity in his schooling and occupational

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[157] Berat (33:00)

[158] It is true that, as a Western interviewer, there may have been some care taken not to offend me, which could potentially have influenced some of their responses regarding their attitudes toward the West. However, given that there was no indication in lifestyle choices to avoid Western culture either, it may be asserted that this played a relatively minor role in the comments made.

decisions, as well as in ways that he spends his free time, the forms of worship he adopts and the contexts in which he relates to others (finding community in a *sohbet*, for example, which centers itself on the discussion of a text.)

The second most internalized value was a reticence toward or a complete rejection of nationalism. Though there were some who did not ascribe to this at all, fervently embracing Turkishness and the nation-state as a partner, most *Nur* students expressed some degree of hesitation with regard to nationalism. This constraint in partnering with the nation-state might affect the way an individual views her country, her opinion of the place of religion in relation to the government, and the extent to which her sense of belonging is tied to her nationality.

Third on the list was the restriction on political involvement, a value which about half of the interviewees adamantly endorsed and the other half acknowledged verbally but simultaneously defended a different course of personal action. Though for most this role constraint would have a limited impact on their individual identity, determining only the extent of their involvement in a political party, for a few the effect is quite marked in that they refrain from even informal political conversations among friends and intentionally avoid reading newspapers and staying abreast of political events.

Finally, Nursi's encouragement to approach the West with caution appears to be heeded by almost none of the *Nur* students. Their ready embracing of the West as a partner in both the political and cultural realms indicates that their own internal self-definitions or the considerations of other external factors exercise more sway with regard to this value. Therefore, Nursi's advice with regard to this partnership cannot be said to affect their individual identities and life choices.

Overall, the impact of the *Nur* movement as an external actor on individual identity is less pronounced than might be expected and the degree of individual autonomy in the face of these external definitions seems to be high. Of course, in having eliminated the values that are traditionally associated with Islam from consideration, this may, too, have removed the areas of life that are most drastically impacted by the movement. The ramifications of these "Muslim" values on identity may be seen in part with reference to some of the boundary markers discussed in Chapter Four. For example, the *Nur* students' emphasis on their behavior and basic

value orientations as a distinguishing factor in their group identity must also be understood as reflecting a synthesis of external expectations of behavior with internal self-definitions and thus changing the dynamics of the internal-external dialectic shaping individual identity. Perhaps in these areas the influence of the *Nur* movement on the individual self would be found to be more striking. Nonetheless, though more limited than expected, the *Nur* movement's shaping of an individual's interaction with the external, prescribing their values in some significant areas, should be understood as an important aspect of identity formation.

5.3 Internally-Formed Self Definitions

Jenkins' model of the internal-external dialectic was chosen for this study of individual identity largely on the basis of this final section. Because Jenkins' theory arguably allows room for internal self-definition, occurring away from and later being brought to the boundary of the self, it was seen as a more appropriate schema for a religious movement characterized as personal and intimate by its adherents. In the same way that the two externals considered above, the "outside other" and the "inside other," bring to the internal-external dialectic certain expectations, demands and definitions which must then be negotiated by the self at that boundary in the process of identity construction, the self may be seen as also presenting its own self-definitions at that same boundary, changing the dynamic of the synthesis process. These self-definitions with respect to the *Nur* movement are not formed in isolation but in relation to the *Risale-i Nur*, a text to which the *Nur* students ascribe great worth and which they believe helps them to understand God's message.[159] Thus in this last section we will address the way in which the *Nur* students articulated changes in their internal self-definitions based on their interaction with the *Risale*.

Before proceeding to consider the actual articulated changes, it is necessary to pause briefly and address the way in which the *Nur* students speak of the *Risale* in a personal fashion. Of all the interviewees Eda expressed this intimate interaction with the text most clearly: "With every reading I feel different things. […] Maybe I started reading it a little bit by accident but that accident has become like a magic

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[159] For a discussion of the way in which the *Nur* students view the *Risale-i Nur* as being akin to the Koran and therefore spiritually significant, see Chapter Four (4.3.2.1)

spell (*büyü, bir sihir*), encompassing my whole life."[160] She proceeds later in the interview to explain the way in which the *Risale* speaks directly and specifically to her as an individual:

> When I read the *Risale*, I am reading it to my inner self. I am addressing it to my inner self (*nefsim*). One of the most basic characteristics of the *Risale* is this. A person addresses it to herself; a person can just be with herself.   She realizes what she needs; she can find exactly what she is looking for. […] The things written are only about you. I think the *Risale*'s most basic characteristic is this.[161]

For Eda, then, the reading of the *Risale* speaks very specific and personal things into her life; one can sense that she feels a closeness, a nearness to the text as she speaks about it. Others likewise indicated ways in which the text had touched them in deep and personal ways. Meltem, for example, spoke of the way in which reading the *Risale* filled the emptiness inside of her, an emptiness which returned when she was away from it for a period of time:

> [After I became a *Risale-i Nur* student] I was more filled with peace within and I continuously wanted to possess more of the characteristics of my religion, of Islam. I wanted it to be more a part of my life, and I wanted to know more about all the different aspects of my religion; I felt the need to read more. And it gave me peace and happiness. When I didn't read or didn't worship I would feel an emptiness. These things filled the emptiness and made me happy.[162]

This passage also reveals one of the changes articulated by the *Nur* students as a result of their interaction with the *Risale*, being filled with peace.

Fatih, much like Meltem, also experienced a change in his emotional state as a result of reading the *Risale*. He claims that he was given peace and a calm, even anticipatory, approach to the subject of death that he did not previously possess:

> In terms of life, some things change [after you begin reading the *Risale*]. What kinds of things change? For myself I can give this kind of an example: I thought in the past that we will live life, die and go. When I was in middle school I had that kind of an empty thought. Now at least I know this, death is not a separation; on the contrary it is a union. […] It is a day of waiting

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[160] Eda (1:00)

[161] Eda (9:45)

[162] Meltem (5:00)

for your love in the same way that one who loves someone else waits, with their eyes on the road.[163]

In essence what Fatih is referring to in this passage is a theme which I heard over and over again in the interviews, that the *Risale* brings a change in perspective; not only death, but also life appears different to the *Nur* students after having read it. Yasemin expresses it as an alteration in outlook which causes her to see everything around her in a different light:

> The *Risale*'s most important characteristic is giving you a new way to look at the world. […] For example, I even look at a flower differently; it is also God's creation; it also worships God; its existence is also beneficial for people and for animals, for other created things. Otherwise a normal person looks and may say, that is a flower; it can be plucked. But, Said Nursi, for example, doesn't want it to be plucked because it is also a life; there is also worship in it. […] In that way the *Risale* provides a new perspective.[164]

Perhaps this "new perspective" of which Yasemin speaks is the most tangible evidence of the process of internal change which alters the way a *Nur* student interacts with the world. When she approaches the boundary of the internal and the external, when she comes to the point of negotiation between the self and the other, she claims to come in a different state than previously; she has changed due to the her interaction with the *Risale*.

Emre likewise notes this change in perspective (*bakış açısı*) as having coming from the *Risale*. He states,

> After a person has read [the *Risale*], their way of seeing things changes. *Usta* did not establish a different form of Islam but rather changes a person's perspective. After you have read it, it changes because now, when you look at everything, you see it with the eyes of a believer. […] *Usta* teaches how to look at things around you. For a person who believes, it is like a guide (*kılavuz*).[165]

Emre's characterization of the lessons he learns from the *Risale* as a guide of "how to look at things around you" is revealing. As discussed previously, some of the values which Nursi himself endorsed and taught have not been highly internalized

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[163] Fatih (11:30)

[164] Yasemin (5:00)

[165] Emre (14:00) For another comment on the new perspective given by the *Risale*, see Eda (11:00) in Appendix B.

by his followers. As an external force negotiating with the internal self-definitions, the *Nur* movement may not be as influential as would be expected. Nonetheless, according to the *Nur* students, they perceive the *Risale* as having been the source of fundamental change in their lives. This indicates that, in light of the interviews conducted, understanding the *Risale* and the *Nur* movement solely as the "inside other" offering external definitions of the self is somewhat incomplete. For the *Nur* students, the *Risale* constitutes something more complex, something which not only functions as an "inside other" but also somehow alters the internal self. It guides one's interaction with the external from inside, through interactions with the text which change one's self-definitions, allowing one to function with a new perspective of the world. Thus, when considering individual identity, the *Nur* movement must be viewed as both an "inside other" and as an means by which the internal is redefined. In reference to Jenkins' model, then, it functions on both sides of the dialectic and may therefore be understood as quite important in the synthesis of the self.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

This thesis has comprised a study of the identity of the contemporary *Nur* movement in Turkey with respect to both the group and the individual. An attempt was made to understand the identity of the group by utilizing Norbert Elias's conceptualization of the "survival unit." Further clarification of the group identity, specifically its identity vis-à-vis those outside the movement as well as the identities of the sub-groups within the movement, was ventured through an amalgamation of Thomas Hylland Eriksen's approach to studies of ethnicity and nationalism and Fredrik Barth's boundary model. Finally, once again employing Barth's concept of boundaries, fused this time with Richard Jenkins' internal-external dialectic formulation, the individual identity of the *Nur* students was addressed. All of these various angles to approach the question of identity were considered in light of the *emic* perspective.

By way of a brief conclusion, I would like to offer some of my own observations as an analyst during the period of interviewing the students. Perhaps one of the most interesting patterns I noticed was the seeming difference in the *Nur* students' openness and willingness to connect me with other potential interviewees based on their city of residence. As indicated in the introduction, I completed interviews in Turkey's three largest cities, Istanbul, Ankara and Izmir. This had not been my original intention. I had thought I would be able to find ten interviewees in Ankara, but this proved to be more challenging than I had anticipated. Indeed, the interviewees in Ankara seemed the most reticent, not so much to speak with me personally, but to involve any of their friends in the process. Despite repeated requests, none of the Ankara interviewees ever referred me to anyone else in Ankara (though one did provide me with a name of an interviewee in Istanbul). This might not strike one as remarkable in and of itself, but when contrasted with the attitudes I

encountered in Istanbul and somewhat less so in Izmir, it comprises a notable distinction. When I arrived in Istanbul to meet a young man with whom I had only conversed over email up to that point, not only were there two other friends waiting with him to be interviewed as well, but he had arranged for far more interviews than I was even able to accept. My experience in Izmir likewise differed greatly from Ankara, though it was not as drastic as Istanbul. I not only conducted interviews with several in Izmir based on a contact with a friend of a friend who I had never met before, I was also invited into their homes and met their parents.

There could be many reasons for this ostensibly geographical difference. Perhaps my own personal proximity to the students' lives in Ankara, and the fact that the thesis was being written through a university in the same city made the interviewees somewhat cautious. A more intriguing possibility, though I have nothing but circumstantial evidence to prove it, is that because of Ankara's position at the heart of governmental affairs there is, in general, a greater awareness of potential ramifications and thus more care is taken in exposing themselves to potential scrutiny. Or perhaps it was simply coincidence based on the individuals I happened to know and the connections that happened to be made.

Another interesting trend I noticed when conducting research was a difference based on gender. Overall, I found the men to be more willing than the women to agree to speak with me. Of course, the ratio of men to women I interviewed (7:3) most likely approximates the actual ratio of the movement as a whole, as it continues to be predominantly male. So, perhaps the ease with which I found men to interview in comparison to women was not remarkable at all. One incident, however, seemed to indicate a greater hesitation on the part of the female population. A friend of a friend, a woman, had agreed to conduct an interview with me. In fact, she had expressed a great deal of excitement about the possibility, seeing it as an opportunity to make sure that the movement was correctly represented. However, upon speaking with her *abla* ("big sister") in the movement regarding this potentiality, she was advised against it and later withdrew her consent. The explanation that she was given was that speaking with me might, in the future, harm her chances of getting a job, though she had been assured of the confidentiality of the interview. One cannot fault her for her choice; she and I had never met and

given my own identity as an analyst (foreign, Christian, etc) there were numerous reasons for her to follow her *abla*'s advice. Yet I found it notable that such an incident did not occur with any of the male interviewees. (It's also interesting to note that this incident took place in Ankara, further supporting the observation that there seems to be a greater sense of caution in that city as opposed to others). Strictly in terms of time, too, the males interviewed longer than the females and, to my surprise, required less prompting. They seemed, overall, more eager to speak. Thus, in the small sample I encountered, there appeared to be some definite differences within the movement with regard to gender.

Finally, and perhaps not surprisingly, I sensed as an interviewer that the *Nur* students had a strong desire for me to share their beliefs. Much of what was said, I often felt, was more for my benefit, for the sake of influencing my faith and beliefs, than for any research purpose. I was given, quite generously, numerous books by the various interviewees about Nursi, Gülen, and Islam, along with specific passages from the Koran and the *Risale* regarding belief. One of the interviewee's fathers who I met suggested that, after all of my reading, I too might become a Muslim. In an informal conversation over lunch with another group of interviewees one of them explained why he had agreed to speak with me. He said something to the effect of, "One day I will come before God. If I didn't speak with you, He will ask me why, when given the opportunity, I didn't explain it to you." Thus, I had the impression that many of the interviewees had chosen to talk with me in the hopes of sharing their beliefs with me, and possibly convincing me of their understanding of truth.

Perhaps what I was most aware of throughout this process, however, was the intangible and indefinite nature of the task I had chosen. One of the students, when speaking about the *Nur* movement, explained it like this:

> With *Risale-i Nur* students there are not sharp lines. There is moderation because *Usta* was like this. He never said something was certainly like this or that. […] [W]ith Aristotle's logic, one exists and zero doesn't. But *Usta* says between one and zero there are endless numbers. One must find that place in between. Something is not just black or white, there is also gray. We try to see the gray all the time.[166]

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[166] Fatih (37:15)

I felt during this study that I had set out to define the un-definable; that I was, in some sense, trying to see the gray. I recognize that what is contained in these pages is neither black nor white. Even the areas where it appears to be black or white, it really isn't so. I hope what emerges instead is an accurate shade of gray.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX **A**

DESCRIPTIONS OF THE INTERVIEWEES

Ahmet: Ahmet is a student in the natural sciences at a well-respected private university. He comes from a family of five children. His father graduated from primary school and his mother didn't attend school but learned how to read from his grandparents. His father is now retired and his parents live in their village. He began reading the *Risale-i Nur* in middle school when he and a group of his friend began going to *Risale* lessons. He says that he felt a need for this because he had not been taught very much about religious topics at home or in school. He left his family eight years ago (as a middle-school student), by his own choice, to attend a *cemaat* school and began at that time living with other *Risale-i Nur* students. Though this decision to leave was initially difficult for his family, especially his mother, they now see the positive side of his choice. He currently lives in a *cemaat* house; it is a very small *cemaat* that broke off from the Gülen *cemaat* about 20 years ago now. One of their *abis* is a man who Said Nursi originally designated as one of his official representatives (*mutlak vekillim*). Ahmet's *cemaat* focuses very strongly on the reading of the Risale, sometimes closing their house for days just to read and pray. He hopes to teach in a private school or *dershane* near his family after finishing his education, though not in a *cemaat* school because he sees potential complications in entering into trade or business with the *cemaat*.

Berat: Berat is a student of political science at a highly acclaimed university in Turkey. He started attending a Gülen school when he was in middle school (grade 6). Originally, he didn't attend for religious reasons but because he wanted to experience the atmosphere of a private school, a *kolej*, and that was the only option in his hometown. He continued to study there throughout high school because it offered the highest quality education in the city. As a university student he is much more involved with the movement and currently lives in a *cemaat* house. Berat is a serious young man and is very concerned about the cause of justice. He wants to be in a job where he can fight for and maintain justice and thinks he will perhaps work in a political party or in some branch of government when he finishes university, though he is not certain. He is very optimistic that the animosity he finds present in politics now does not always have to exist and believes that there will be a time when the situation will allow for substantial involvement in politics.

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Cemal: Cemal is a student of political science. He began reading of Nursi as a result of his family who also read the *Risale*, though he emphasized that there is no requirement or pressure for another to read it. He attended a *cemaat* school in Uzbekistan, when he and his family lived there for five years due to his father's job. Apparently it was the only Turkish school available. Cemal doesn't just read the Risale but other religious books as well, including those of other religions. He often spends time on the internet chatting, especially with foreigners, listening to their view of Islam, and trying to correct their misconceptions. He was, notably, the only interviewee to quote Atatürk during the interview. His favorite film is "The Green Mile."

Demir: Demir is a student of political science at one of Turkey's most renowned universities. Though he attended a school founded by the Gülen movement since he was in primary school, neither he nor his family read the *Risale-i Nur* when he was growing up. His attendance at the school was largely an economic decision because he had received a scholarship. His parents are both educated; his father has a Master's degree and his mother a Bachelor's. He hopes to continue his education after university and plans to pursue a Master's degree. In his last year of high school he was invited by someone he knew to attend a lesson about the *Risale* and he considers this his first real exposure to Nursi. He began reading the *Risale* for himself the summer after he graduated from high school and continues to do so, though he does not consider himself part of any sub-group or *cemaat*. He feels strongly that one should not make concessions regarding their beliefs for any worldly reason and has experienced the consequences of such a conviction in his own life. In one of his university classes, the final exam conflicted with the Friday prayers. He talked with the professor, who said he wasn't going to change the time, and so Demir chose to attend the prayers rather than take the exam and he failed the course as a result. Given his scholarly temperament, this was obviously a sacrifice for him.

Eda: Eda has been reading the *Risale* for 7-8 years. Her mother and father don't read the *Risale* at all, though her mother read the first four Words last year due to Eda's persistent pleading, but she has stopped reading it now. Eda emphasizes how different the *Risale* is, how much it has encompassed her life, how it has changed her. She does not cover her head because of the difficulties that incurs, but hopes to one day, provided that the circumstances are right. She is engaged to be married. She meets with other *Nur* students once a week to read and discuss the *Risale* together. She also functions as an *abla* for a group of girls younger than her, her little sister's age, meeting with them on the weekends to study the *Risale* together. She is very interested in reading and reads everything from politics, to books about other religions, to romantic novels. Her favorite film is "The Enemy of the State." Both her father, her fiancé and her fiancé's father have all been active in politics. This has influenced her a great deal and she plans one day to become involved as well.

Emre: Emre is a chemistry student at one of Turkey's best universities. His family read the *Risale-i Nur*, more his father than his mother, since he was born. Both his father and his mother are university graduates. He started reading the *Risale* for himself at university when a friend of his father's took an interest in him and gave him an introduction to it. He feels that the Risale-i Nur meets his needs and helps him with problems and he does not regret following that path. Though he considers himself a *Nur* student, he does not consider himself part of a specific *cemaat* but interacts with people from many different groups. His father is a businessman so he didn't go to university in order to get a job; he studies because he likes the university he attends and because he enjoys chemistry. He will probably work for his father or in another company in the private sector after he completes his education. His favorite films are "The Gladiator" and "The Last Samuri" and he said that he always prefers foreign films over local ones.

Fatih: Fatih is a student of economics. His father studied literature in the 1980s and, though his studies were interrupted by the conflicts in the country at that time, he passed on to his children his love of reading by taking up either the *Risale-i Nur* or another book each night and reading it to the family. As a result, Fatih found he had a significant connection to the *Risale*, though his family put no pressure on him to read it. Until the end of high school, however, Fatih looked at the *Risale* only as something from his family, not something personal to him. During his freshman year at university he began to read it for himself. His father and mother both continue to read the *Risale,* but his siblings don't read it or follow it closely, though they are sympathetic to it. He identifies himself as a part of the Fethullah Gülen *cemaat* and is careful to emphasize that the work of Gülen is simply a continuation of Nursi's. He hopes in the future to do doctoral work, and eventually to become an academician because he says it is difficult to find professors who are objective (*tarafsız*). He loves going to the cinema, and watches movies out maybe two or three times a week.

Meltem: Meltem just completed a Bachelor's degree in film and radio and plans to do a Master's degree in the United States. She first started reading Nursi through her teachers at a *Nur dershane* she was attending beginning in her second year of high school. They talked about Nursi; she became curious and felt that as a Muslim she should read it. Her parents also read the Risale and are happy that she does, though it was always left up to her whether or not she would. Right, because of having to uncover at school and the difficulties it can cause, she does not cover her head, though she hopes to be one day. She would like to work in television as a camera technician when she has finished her education. She really likes action and horror films.

Selim: Selim is a student of tourism. His family did not read the *Risale-i Nur* when he was growing up and actually many of the people that he knew were opposed to it. His father had read Nursi when he was a young man and entered a *cemaat* at that time but later broke off from it before Selim was born. In Selim's sophomore year of high school, when he was attending a *cemaat* school, one of his teachers captured his attention. Selim was interested in this teacher because he actually lived out what he said. When Selim asked a friend about this teacher and his way of life, the friend

responded that it was because the teacher read the *Risale-i Nur*. That night Selim returned home and found some of the Nursi books his father had purchased a long time before. Selim wanted to be like that teacher so he picked up a book and read some of it that night. He has continued reading since that time and is now in a *cemaat* and living in a *cemaat* house. Though he couldn't give me a name, he did say that the people in his *cemaat* don't read newspapers or watch television and are not involved in politics. Though he went to a *cemaat* school in high school, his parents and those around him began to look favorably upon the *Risale* only after they saw in him changes of behavior. He is curious about history and likes to read history books as a hobby, though his *abis* tell him it would be better if he didn't read them and read the *Risale* instead.

Yasemin: Yasemin is a student of economics. She first became familiar with Nursi in middle school because of the *cemaat* school she attended, though she didn't read it for herself at that time because of the difficulty of the language. In high school and university she began reading the *Risale* quite a lot and now considers herself part of the Gülen *cemaat*. Her mother and father both graduated from university. Her father graduated from the theology department. Her mother was only a high school graduate but later, while raising three children, finished university. Yasemin is also a hard working student, the first in her class. She hopes to teach at a university one day, to help train up others and to always be able to research. She covers her head and has found that those at the university, though originally keeping some distance as a result, now know and like her. Her family is very pleased that she is a *Nur* student. Her mother also goes to the *sohbets* and has been familiar with Nursi since she was a child. Yasemin likes watching police films and the CSI series and reading Agatha Christie novels. In her family being involved in politics has been a tradition and she has very recently become involved with the youth branch of the AK Party.

REFERENCED QUOTATIONS NOT INCLUDED IN ACTUAL TEXT

<u>AHMET:</u>
(9:30) It [one's being a *Nur talebe*] can be recognized from the outside. Let me say this: Clothing, what you wear, you will see more long-sleeved dress shirts and slacks and a small mustache. Let me say this: I was sitting at a bus stop and people came and said hi to me. I didn't know them at all but from their faces it was apparent [they were *Nur talebe*]. It was obvious. From their clothing it is very obvious from the outside. They [the movement] do not give a definite standard [of dress] for people but whether they want to or not it happens.

(11:15) When you say what is *Nurculuk*, let me say this, from the time of the Prophet until now in every period/time apparent Islamic leaders existed. They interpreted Islam in their own style. For example, […] the Nakşibendis, they have their own tarikats, they are both different. Or Mevlana Jamal-al-Rumi, for example he had his own style. In our period, Bediüzzaman came, we think. And his style is very appropriate/fitting for this period we believe. I mean, the answer to the question of how the Koran should be understood in this age is *Nurculuk*.

(14:00) Also the *tarikats* of today are not sufficient in the practice of Islam because they don't give to people. In general, they address a person who basically already believes. But the *Risale-i Nur* can explain things to one who does not believe, does not know God or himself because the basic things are logical.

(22:00) But the essential thing is the *Risale-i Nur*. For that reason, the *Risale-i Nur* does not allow for animosity between the different groups. In Ankara there is such a thing. We went to the lessons of another *cemaat*; they also came to ours. We are a small *cemaat* here in Ankara. We can go outside of our cities, for example if a friend is accepted to a university and goes to another place, we ask who is there from different *cemaat*s. We send them to the people who are there. There they continue. They do not stop just because we are not there. Since the *Risale-i Nur* is the central thing, if that is there, you can take part.

(54:45) When I think of being a good Turk, the most important thing for us is that for hundreds of years we have carried the Islamic flag. When the Turks came to Anadolu as Muslims, they took the leadership of Islam in their hands. This fell from their hands at the beginning of this century. Being a good Turk is to be able to once again raise it, because the flag fell here.

(1:00:00) *What do you think of the Pope's visit to Turkey?* I haven't thought a lot about it to be honest. On one hand it is a good thing. Because there are many people in Turkey who do not want to accept that Turkey is an Islamic country. The Pope's visit to Turkey was that of a Christian leader coming to a Muslim nation, for example. From that perspective it was a good thing, I think. It brought some things out in the open, I could say. What is reality became obvious.

BERAT:
(2:00) My father speaks of our going to those schools with thankfulness because when he looks at other young people they are not respectful of their families or studying for their classes and are often in the vicinity of trouble. He is pleased that we are respectful of them and look upon them favorably and he attributes it to these schools. I think he is right.

(17:00) Different abis interpret it differently. They all show a way. In some of their opinions this movement should be become a *tarikat*. So some saw it as a movement and some as a *tarikat*. Some also believed that not every character/kind of person could enter. Only those with a specific/definite character can be in the group. But everyone can enter the path that Fethullah Gülen showed.

(25:00) Actually this is something opposite of the *Nur* movement because there is a saying about this by *Usta*. However, in the time when *Usta* lived being involved in politics absolutely meant being opposed to/an enemy of your brothers in Islam. For that reason *Usta* said, "May God protect me from politics," for example. But when we look at our day, everywhere good people are being raised up. For that reason in politics as well there are deficiencies. Let's say this, why can't there be a party with 300 members of the Grand National Assembly who pray five times a day? If they were all trained well, as scientist, in every area, in law, etc, if they serve the people well, if they are just people, why shouldn't there be a big party who can bring this country to the best place/situation.

(32:00) For that reason, at the universities there are thousands of members of this [*Nur*] movement but never has there been a fight. But if we look at the communists, they are a small number but are always fighting.

(41:00) Some [friends] know [I am a *Risale-i Nur talebe*] and some don't. In our country some people are against religious people. Directly showing such people that you are religious is meaningless. First, if you love them, show them that you love them, show them that you value them, after that, when they learn that you are religious, they do not respond with a strong reaction. And, actually, they will say you are a good person and this is because of the character of Islam. It is better this way. But if there are those who are also religious or are not opposed to religion, we do not see their knowledge of this as a problem. For that reason I have friends that know and friends that don't. Those who don't know are not uninformed because we told them lies. They just didn't ask and we didn't say. In that way we are not in the position of having told a lie. It is better for our friendship and we can be a good example to them.

CEMAL:
(19:30) If you live inside of a group, a person cannot get tired of, get bored with life. Let's think of someone who lives in a dorm. In the dorm he has no friends. What does a person do? He will get bored, he will get down (*canı sıkılmak*). If his classes go poorly, in the end what does he do? God forbid, he will kill himself. He will go out of his mind (*kafa yer*) and commit suicide. The issue is not a *cemaat*, it is to have a group of friends. They will support you.

(36:45) Europe has a need for Turkey. Of course Turkey has a need for Europe too but, in my opinion, Europe's need for Turkey is greater. First of all, because in Europe there is not a young population who will work. I went to Lithuania, there is no young population. They were all older.

DEMIR:
(30:15) The difference between the *Nur cemaat* and other movements stems from the difference between *tesavuf* and the understanding of Islam that Bediüzzaman brings. *Tesavuf* is a bit more of Islam's "heart interpretation." For example, they still go down the path of the Prophet's practice and *Sunnet* however, not based so much on thought, on reading books, on research, on looking at the original source.

EDA:
(3:15) When [my father] sees the atmosphere at universities or of various groups, it is very important to him that we [his children] are this put together, that we haven't lost our values, that we are aware of things. My father saw raising children in a big city like a nightmare. He was right; to raise the kind of children he wanted was difficult. But with the *Risale*, when he saw us being trained up with it, when he saw it affecting our lives, my dad was really happy. […] For my father, we have become ideal people. […] We show him respect; we are the kind of people he wanted [us to be]. We don't have any bad habits, like cigarettes or alcohol. […] He says he owes a lot to the *Risale*.

(11:00) I also became more aware of my surroundings with the *Risale*. What did I realize? In one place in the *Risale* it explains an apple, an orange […] or a flower, for example. I realized that it wasn't a normal thing, but art. The *Risale* really changed my perspective on life, my understanding of life. I really began to take pleasure in life, to taste life, with the *Risale*. I dove into a vast sea. Maybe I only took a drop but that one drop […] it explained to me many things. I am so glad I got to know it.

(23:30) The *Mesnevi* at that time was the most important book in terms of interpretation or books given by tarikats, those kind of things. Nursi says that if he had come into the world during Mevlana's time, I would have written the *Mesnevi*. If Mevlana had come into the world at my time, he would have written the *Risale*. The *Risale* was that necessary because the Koran is not a directly understandable book. It is a book that requires some work. The *Risale* makes this simpler. By using stories it becomes more understandable, or becomes understandable by everyone. […] The *Risale* was necessary for this period of time.

EMRE:
(8:45) He helps people with things. In every age there is a problem. For example, Mevlana, everyone knows him. He was that kind of a person, for example. He had the same duty. In a specific age, he produces the solutions to specific problems. Or Imam Ghazali […]. He is spoken about in many books. There is a situation like that. In every age a solution is brought. In the end I see those problems and I think that I really do accept that those problems exist. He produces a solution. Because I felt a need for it myself, I am trying to take up the solution he produced.

(15:45) This is very important. [The *Risale*] is not *Usta*'s perspective (*bakış açısı*). This is very important. It is the Koran's perspective. It is completely the Koran's not someone's.

FATIH:
(42:00) *Usta* erased the line of nationalism. You are Kurdish, you are Turkish, it doesn't exist; it doesn't matter. If you are Arabic or Iranian, *Hazreti* Mohammed said something very good about this: *Arabın Aceme Acemin Araba, hiç bir üstünlüğü yoktur* (Neither the Arabs nor the Persians are superior).

MELTEM:
(1:45) In high school during the day each week there were sohbets about only the *Risale*. The *Risale*, in terms of pronunciation and words, has a difficult language. For that reason we worked on it together. In order to be able to understand what we were reading better, we got education on it. […] When you read it a lot, when you follow it continuously, it [the language] is put into practice in your daily life as a residual effect.

(16:30) I can't imagine Turkey entering the EU. I don't predict that something like that is going to be possible. In the end I don't believe that the EU will accept a Muslim country. I don't expect it to happen so I haven't considered it that much. There are many things that separate us. Because we are a group of Muslims I think we already lost it, from the beginning. The conflict of ideas will be considerable.

SELIM:
(6:00) I can tell very well if someone is [a *Risale talebe*]. Those who read the *Risale* are obvious from their outward appearance. For example, they have a mustache, they have a special mustache. […] Also, their clothing is different. It is apparent, I can easily ascertain it. In terms of clothing, they wear slacks and a button-down shirt. Their hair is combed (*taraklı taralı*)

(6:15) And if we speak a little bit within 5 minutes I can tell [they are a *Risale talebe*]. The words they use are very different. They use a lot of different words, from Ottoman Turkish. […] They don't speak the Turkish of today but closer to Ottoman Turkish.

(11:30) I will explain this to my friends. If my friend is in a sad or difficult time. If they ask me, "What am I going to do?" There are times like that, when their morale is low, exams are very bad, for example. At that time, there are sentences from the

Risale that have been an example for me. Because there was a time when my exams were very bad and by reading the *Risale* I was able to throw off that bad psychological state. There I explain it directly to my friend. I say, 'look if you do this and this, you do not think too much about the world. God is with you.' In this way I say sentences from the *Risale-i Nur*. In this way I explain it.

(18:30) In the *hadiths* it says that every one hundred years, in every age, a "*muctehit*" will come. A *muctehit* is this: Our Prophet was able to see the future. He said, in the future, if it continues like this, every century there will attacks by atheists on Muslims which is going to cause confusion. To correct this confusion God will send a *muctehit* to straighten it out and return it to the way it was when our Prophet was here, every one hundred years. We believe *Usta* is like this. There was Mevlana, for example. He was a *muctehit*. Because in the time that he came however much was broken, according to that he behaved. For example, when Imam Ghazali came, philosophy had progressed significantly, he was also a *muctehit*. He presented several books against the atheists. […] The *Risale-i Nur* answers the questions of today like: Why do we believe in God? Why did God create us? Did He have a need for our worship? These questions are answered by the *Risale* and in a very logical manner.

(58:00) *Usta* said something like this, so did Hocaefendi: Muslims must be intelligent/clever. Muslims should have some knowledge about most things. They should not remain ignorant, because at this time the biggest problem is ignorance.

YASEMIN:
(1:00) Because the *Risale* is an explanation (*tefsir*) of the words in the Koran, in the end is shows the attributes of the Koran. […] The *Risale* directly explains the Koran; what is necessary to be a good Muslim, both in terms of worship and in terms of being a righteous person. For that reason, I think a good Muslim will definitely read the *Risale*.

(16:15) When you start to refer to people as a group, bad things start to happen because everyone starts to say something about you. Actually, everyone is working to be a servant of God. Our goal is to win the next world. *Nurcu* or *Acu* or *Bcu*, it doesn't matter at all. Everyone is working for the same thing: to win the next world. There was one man, a *Risale talebe*, we went to one of his meetings. He said, if you want to go to Istanbul, one may go with a plane, one with a bus and one with a car. It doesn't matter because the purpose is to go to Istanbul, only the ways are different. Everyone uses a different vehicle. *Nurcu*, *ocu*, *bucu*, those don't matter. For that reason I think that it is wrong. Also, for example, one may say [she] got on a plane, how awful, or [that other girl] got on a bus, how awful! When you say these kinds of things, people start to think bad things about each other. […] So, saying the *Nurcus* are like this or the others are like that is not an agreeable thing. It turns us from our purpose; it is not flattering to us. For that reason, that kind of a separation is not necessary.

(23:30) There are ablas that we work together with. In every group there definitely has to be one who is a teacher or a big *abla*. Without them controlling ourselves

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may be more difficult. She may choose the subject, what we read together, she gathers us together, helps us to understand, she helps us to connect a subject with one we have read before, for example. She has the attribute of a leader in the group. They are our ablas, they control us, helps us, show us the way, bring us back to the subject, we can list all types of things.

(33:30) The first thing that comes to my mind is Turkey's geopolitical situation. Turkey is both east and west, it is a middle point where those two fuse. In the Ottoman times it was the same, east and west at the same time. In education and science it was at the summit. At this point perhaps the west has snatched it from us a little bit but actually all of that knowledge (*ilimler*) comes from us, its source is in the Ottoman times. It was developed from there because they gave it great importance. For that reason, Turkishness is very important. We need to be able to return to the status at the Ottoman times. Humanity (*insanlık*) was also very important. For example, they would tie a sac to a tree and those who wanted to give alms (*zekat)* would tie up the bags, and the poor could come and take as much, I emphasize as much, as they wanted of those bags. In the Ottoman times they did this so that no one would remain poor. Can you imagine what it means to have a country where no one is poor? Everyone can take as much as they want. Today if we tied something to a tree it wouldn't even be there the next day. We need to return to that period, that is actually what Turkishness means. The roots of being a Turk are there. […] Now however much we break away from Turkishness, that is how much worse we can go *(Şu an Türklükten ne kadar koparsak, o kadar daha kötüye gidebiliriz)*. For that reason it is necessary for us to turn back to it.

(38:00) It seems to me they are going to need us. They will need our people strength. Both as a country where the east and west fuse because the European countries, for example with Saudi Arabia, their relationships seem a bit broken. The thing that will join them is us. We will establish something in the middle/between them. For that reason, they have a need for us in every respect, in the ways I mentioned previously. So, it seems to me, they are going to run after us. I am looking at it optimistically.

APPENDIX C

QUESTIONS FOR INTERVIEWEES

Category	Analyst Assumptions	Specific Questions
Definition of a *Risale-i Nur* student	A *Nur* student is a Muslim who studies the writings of Said Nursi and believes the ideas he presents including: the world as a book; the importance of science in knowing God; the centrality of the Koran	1. How did you begin reading Said Nursi? 2. What originally attracted you to the *Nur* movement?* 3. How do you know if someone else is a *Nur* student? What characteristics do they have? 4. What are the most fundamental beliefs you must hold to be a *Nur* student? 5. How would you define *Nurculuk*?*
Community and The *Nur* Movement	The *Nur* community (*Nur cemaat*) is an integral part of being a *Nur* student and is often what originally attracts individuals and continues to shape their lives through communal living and discussion groups (*sohbet*). The *Nur* movement cannot exist apart from the community (*cemaat*).	1. Before joining the *Nur* movement, did you know other *Nur* students? What relationship did you have to them? 2. Do you spend time with other *Nur* students on a regular basis now? What do you do in your times together? 3. Is it possible to be a *Nur* student and not be involved with others in the movement? 4. How do you define *cemaat*?
The *Nur* Movement and Politics	Being involved in the *Nur* movement influences or even determines one's stance toward political involvement and one's choice of political party.	1. Do you vote in elections? 2. What do you believe about being involved in politics? 3. How does this relate to Nursi's ideas about political involvement?

The *Nur* Movement and Personal Life	Being involved in the *Nur* movement shapes many aspects of one's personal life apart from the spiritual including position within one's family, career choices, and interactions with friends.	1. Is your family aware of your involvement in the *Nur* movement? How do they feel about it? 2. Would you like you're your friends to also become *Nur* students? Do you talk with them about this? 3. Do you read the newspaper? Which one?** 4. What kinds of books do you like to read?** 5. How often do you try to read the Koran, the *hadiths* and the *Risale-i Nur*? Which one do you start with when you read?**
The West**	Though *Nur* movement adherents would be critical of the West and Western culture in their discourse, they are actually highly involved in Western ideas through the entertainment industry and education. Thus their convictions do not necessarily coincide with their choices in this category.	1. What is your favorite movie? How often do you watch movies? What types of movies do you like?** 2. Would you ever consider studying abroad? Where would you like to study? Is there anywhere you wouldn't want to go?** 3. What kind of music do you listen to?** 4. Do you use the internet? If so, do you perceive any dangers in doing so?**
The *Nur* Movement, other Islamic Groups and the Fragmentation within the *Nur* Movement Itself	The *Nur* movement considers itself distinct from other Islamic movements based on their adherence to Nursi's texts and the Koran. Even some movements which have roots in the *Nur* movement, such as the Gülen movement, are not considered a part of the *Nur* movement proper. The *Nur* movement itself has many different groups with distinct philosophies and diverse approaches.	1. How is the *Nur* movement different from other Islamic groups like the Nakşibendis or Sufis? 2. Is Fethullah Gülen a *Nur* student? Why or why not? 3. Are there different groups within the *Nur* movement? What are they and how do they differ?

The *Nur* Movement and Education	The *Nur* movement's focus on education is attractive to many adherents not only because of their intellectual bent, but because education represents an opportunity to advance beyond the educational levels and economic position of their families.	1. What value do you personally place on education and why? Why is education important to you? 2. What is the highest level of education reached by each of your parents? 3. In what field are your parents currently employed? 4. What are your employment aspirations? Do you wish to work in the same field as your parents? 5. What level of education do your employment aspirations require?
The *Nur* Movement and Turkish Identity	*Nur* students would not see a conflict with being a "true" Turk and being a *Nur* adherent, only with some legal issues (perhaps the headscarf issue) which they find to pose a difficulty in practicing their faith fully. But this is simply a detail of Turkish law, not the essence of Turkishness, which includes being a good Muslim. Regarding Turkey's EU accession, the *Nur* students, particularly those outside of the Gülen movement, would be more likely to oppose this move as it embodies a threat of Westernization.	1. What does it mean to be a "good" Turk? 2. What is your opinion about Turkey's possible admission into the EU? Do you think EU membership poses an opportunity or a threat to Turkish society? 3. Do you consider yourself a good Turkish citizen? Why or why not?* 4. Is there ever any difficulty with being a *Nur* student in Turkey?

Please Note: The interviews were conducted in Turkish. The preceding questions are all translations of those asked in the interviews. Also, because the interviews were semi-structured in nature, not all of the questions were asked in all of the interviews and other questions may have been asked which are not represented here.

*Questions deleted after the first two interviews
**Questions added after first two interviews were completed