

SOCIAL FRAGILITY IN MUSLIM SOCIETIES, FITNAH, AND SAID NURSI'S ATTITUDE AGAINST FITNAH

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Fragility refers to the situation between the balance/harmony and conflict/fragmentation of society. The types, causes, and consequences of fragility have been among the main topics of sociology for a long time. While a quarter of the world's population lives in countries that are considered fragile, Muslim societies constitute the majority of this population. This situation requires examining the relationship between *fitnah*, which is a concept of Islamic thought, and fragility. In our study, this relationship was examined through Said Nursi's attitude against *fitnah*. The period in which Nursi lived, the geography, the events he faced, and his works make him a unique model in such a study. In this respect, we hope that our study will contribute to the discussions in the literature on the subject.

KEYWORDS: Fragility, society, sociology, *fitnah*, Said Nursi, Islam.

INTRODUCTION

For societies, stability, balance, and harmony are generally sought after and desired to be achieved. The sustainability of this is even more important. However, for various reasons, this may not always be possible for every society. Situations and periods in which stability, balance, and harmony cannot be achieved sociologically are considered fragility.

Fragility, which varies in type and severity depending on various factors, is discussed in this study through its relationship with *fitnah*, a concept in Islamic thought.¹ While examining this relationship, the demeanor and attitude of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi, an Islamic scholar and commentator of the Qur'an, was taken into consideration as a model. After the theoretical framework of the subject is drawn, Nursi's consideration of *fitnah* and his attitude against it will be emphasized.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

Social integration, fragmentation, harmony, conflict, and *fragility* have been among the main topics of the discipline since the emergence of sociology as a science. Fragility and, on the contrary, social cohesion and integration have an important place in classical sociological theories. Later, these concepts became central to structural-functional theory (Ritzer, 2000a: 118, 432). Despite much debate over the causes and consequences of social fragility, there is no consensus in theory on the definition of fragility. The general trend is to define fragility more as a weakness in the structure, services, and institutional capacity of the state. However, field studies based on countries show that fragility is not only a state weakness but is linked to more complex social factors (Marc et al, 2013, Stewart and Brown, 2010, Read-Brown, 2016).



Many different internal and external factors increase or feed fragility in societies. Social stratification, exclusion, globalization, rapid change, ethnic differences, and international migration are among the most important risk factors that increase fragilities and the risk of conflict (Beall and Piron, 2005: 53, Giddens, 2012: 544). While some of these factors that feed fragility originate from state authority, others are deeply rooted in social dynamics; that is, the way individuals and groups interact and the relationships formed by their interactions. All these components that make up the social capital of a society are in a dynamic communication and exchange process (Beresnevièiûtë, 2003: 104). In this sense, fragility is not a static or temporary situation, but a state of the continuum at varying levels (Marc et al, 2013: 2).

In the structural-functional understanding, fragility has a negative connotation. For this reason, the concepts of social cohesion and integration in terms of eliminating fragility have been emphasized. However, it should not be misinterpreted as the elimination of fragility through social cohesion and the destruction of cultural and social differences (Easterly, Ritzen, and Woolcock, 2006: 103). The harmony here is a harmony that respects differences and an integration achieved by preserving originalities.

There is also a close relationship between stratification and fragility. The presence of stratification, however, is not in itself a cause of fragility because in stratification, there is a mutual dependency and functional relationship between strata, and this situation expresses a state of balance rather than conflict (Grabb, 1990: 101). In this respect, stratification is the result of a necessity for social progress and continuity (Davis and Moore, 1945: 243). The important thing here is that the distance between the layers is not widened and that it does not reach the level of conflict. Therefore, it is not the existence of stratification itself that produces or feeds the fragility, but the opening of the distance between the layers and its transformation into conflict (Orhan, 2023: 8).



When we consider social harmony, balance, integration, and stability as one side of the pendulum and conflict, violence, anomie, and chaos as the other side, fragility refers to the situation between these two. Here, society tends to shift to both sides, depending on the internal and external factors mentioned above. One of the key questions of our study is “What is the effect of the phenomenon of *fitnah* in the process of society’s drifting of the pendulum to the side of conflict, violence, anomie, and chaos?” The fact that Muslims constitute a significant part of the population in societies that are considered fragile makes this question even more meaningful (fragilestatesindex.org). Therefore, before seeking an answer to this question, it is necessary to dwell on the equivalent of the concept of *fitnah* in Islamic thought and sociology.

The Arabic word *fitnah* means to throw metals such as gold and silver into the fire and melt them to purify them. The word gains broader meanings over time and it is used in the meanings such as testing, trying, burning with fire, trouble, calamity, evil; charm, passion, fascination, infatuation; to betray; blasphemy, heresy, sin, disgrace, misguiding from the right path; humiliating/degrading situation, persecution, violence, torture; conflict and war between people, killing, intrigue, cheating; turmoil, people’s disagreement; a specter; property, child (Taş, 2015: 2). As it can be seen, *fitnah* is a negative concept that includes both individual and social meanings.

The word *fitnah* is used 34 times in different places in the Qur’an. The main ones of them are to try, to cause pain and distress (al-Hakim and Alam, 2019: 72-73). With its usage in the Qur’an, *fitnah* corresponds to an individual as well as social testing, suffering and distress. As the messenger and first teacher of the Qur’an, Prophet Muhammad also used the concept of *fitnah* in many of his hadiths so much so that in the hadith literature and major hadith books, there is a separate section about the *fitnahs* reported by the Prophet with the title “*al-Fitan*” (*fitnahs*). In this



context, *fitnah* finds its expression as a corrupt ruler dragging his society into chaos and imposing a reign of oppression by confusing values. In addition, rebellion against a legitimate government and exposure of the society to disasters due to corruption and degeneration were also considered *fitnah*. In such cases, believers who feel themselves in complete insecurity and chaos are advised to isolate themselves from the sources of turmoil until the truth is fully revealed (Kamali, 1993: 180).

On the other hand, in the history of Islam, the concept of *fitnah* has been detached from its context in the Qur'an and hadith and has sometimes also been used as a stigma to suppress and silence any criticism/opposition directed at the state authority or administrators. Even non-violent and merely intellectual critiques were marked as *fitnah* and were violently suppressed. The attitude of the Abbasid Caliph Manşūr, which amounted to torture and killing Imām Abū Hanīfah, is one of the most bitter examples of this (Zorlu, 2013: 310-319).

It is very difficult to find the exact equivalent of the concept of *fitnah* in Islamic thought in the sociology literature. Although conflict and fragmentation are close concepts, they do not fully meet the concept of *fitnah*, which has a wide content. However, the closest equivalent of the concept of *fitnah* in classical sociology must be the concept of *anomie*, which Durkheim brought to the literature. According to Durkheim (1893), society experiences a kind of normlessness and irregularity in the rapid change process it enters, and in this case, the rules and institutions in normal periods become completely or partially dysfunctional. In such a period, society becomes more fragile than in periods of stability and is closer to conflict and chaos. At this point, we can ask the second key question of our study in the context of the relationship between social phenomenon and individual attitude: "So, what should be the social and individual attitude in such an environment of *fitnah*, where fragility increases and chaos prevails rather than order?" We will try to answer this question by



considering the attitude and manner of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi against *fitnah* because, as Sorokin emphasized, there is a strong relationship between individual attitudes and social and cultural structure (Johnston, 1990: 106).

2. SAID NURSI AND HIS ATTITUDE AGAINST FITNAH

Before we move on to Said Nursi's definition of *fitnah* and his attitude against *fitnah/s*, we find it useful to briefly dwell on why we chose Said Nursi for the "model stance against *fitnah*".

2.1. Why Said Nursi?

In an article dealing with the relationship between social fragility and *fitnah* (strife), it is almost impossible to find a more suitable person in Islamic geography than Said Nursi, as a person who lived his life facing these concepts and recorded these confrontations. We can state three main reasons that would require Nursi to be taken into account in such a study:

- Geography and period in which Nursi lived;
- Events in his life; and
- His works exceed 6,000 pages (The *Risale-i Nur* Collection).

Nursi was born in the village of Nurs in the Hizan District of Bitlis in 1876 in the Ottoman geography (Mardin, 1992: 10). When he died in Şanlıurfa in 1960, he left behind witnessing two world wars, the disintegration of the empire he was a citizen of, the establishment of a new state (Turkey), captivity, prisons, and many other historical events from his 84-year life. Therefore, it should not be considered an exaggeration to describe the period



in which he lived as the century of *disasters and annihilations* (Sunuhat, 2019: 319).

Said Nursi, who studied Islamic sciences in classical *madrasah* education, reached a certain scientific fame in the region located in the east and southeast of Turkey at a young age (Saritoprak, 2008: 396). However, Nursi's journey to Istanbul, the imperial capital, at the beginning of his thirties, and the scientific discussions he engaged in there, resulted in the rapid recognition of the time in the circles of scholars and rulers (Şahiner, 2018: 47).

Nursi, who divided his life into two: the Old Said period (1876-1920) and the New Said period (1920-1960) (Vahide, 2010: 169), saw the first half of his life in the Ottoman Empire and the Muslim world, which was disintegrating and separating against Europe, the political and social crises associated with it, the two Balkan wars, the Tripoli resistance, the First World War, the occupation of İstanbul and Turkey's war of independence (Horkuc, 2004: 98). During the First World War, he fought on the eastern front as a volunteer militia commander in the Ottoman army with the rank of colonel (Mardin, 1992: 27), was captured by the Russians and remained in captivity for two years and three months in Kostroma (Saritoprak, 2008: 398). It would be a little understatement to describe these disasters that Nursi witnessed during the Old Said period as social fragility. This period, in which mass (civilian and military) deaths, conflict, poverty and famine became a part of daily life, resembles a series of disasters.

Nursi's Second Said period (1920-1960) was more reclusive than the first, more distant from social and political life. During this period, he devoted all his time to the writing and service of belief in the contemporary Qur'anic commentary, which is known as the *Risale-i Nur* Collection and exceeds six thousand pages (Markham and Pirim, 2011: 14). However, this Second Said period is not much different from the first in terms of *disasters and annihilations*. The strict anti-Islamic interpretation of secularism by the newly established Turkish Republic administration (Turner



and Horkuc, 2009: 21) and his problematic relationship with the Kurds for nation-state building based on Turkish identity have made Nursi a *natural target* as an Islamic scholar of Kurdish origin and influence. In this period, exiles, courts, prisons, and tortures followed Nursi until his death (Markham and Pirim, 2011: 14).

Despite the difficult conditions he was in, Nursi continued to write the *Risale-i Nur* Collection almost uninterruptedly, and the *Nurcu* movement was formed around these works with Nur students reading them. Nurculuk, in this respect, which we can describe as “a religious movement based on the book” (Yavuz, 1995: 325), has millions of followers in Turkey and around the world today (Orhan, 2022: 25). Considering the horrific events such as violence, conflict, and wars that Nursi witnessed throughout his life, these conditions can be expected to have an impact on his personality, methodology, and works. However, on the contrary, Nursi did not compromise on the principle of *positive action*, which he adhered to, no matter how difficult the conditions against him, did not turn to violence and did not use his influence on large masses in the direction of violence. It is even possible to say that in this topic, Nursi was alone among many of his contemporary Islamic scholars and was sometimes accused of passivity (Horkuc, 2004: 281).

2.2. Said Nursi’s Fitnah Description

The richness of meaning of the concept of *fitnah* in Islamic thought is also seen in Nursi’s works. Nursi, who used the concept of *fitnah* a total of 95 times in his *Risale-i Nur* Collection, handled the concept with seven different meanings, to wit:

- The Antichrist, irreligion, materialism, and all kinds of philosophical and political movements against monotheistic



religions that will emerge in the world of humanity at the end of times;

- Making mischief in society, disrupting public order;
- Religious turmoil, separation based on faith;
- War and massacre;
- Tempting, seductive factors, environments, situations;
- Sufyanism, which will emerge in Islamic society at the end of times and will try to abolish the Shari‘ah of Muhammad; and
- Murder, individual manslaughter.

As can be seen, in Nursi’s approach, *fitnah* has a wide range of meanings, from a single murder to wars and massacres, from religious, political or any other turmoil in the society to anti-religious philosophical and political movements. Table 1 shows how many times the concept of *fitnah* is used for each of these meanings in the *Risale-i Nur* Collection.

On the other hand, Nursi sometimes used the words corruption, mischief, and destruction instead of the concept of *fitnah* (*Emirdağ Addendum*, 2019: 29; *Rays*, 2019: 544; *First Period Books*, 2019: 128).

2.3. Said Nursi’s Attitude Against Fitnah

It would be more correct to talk about Said Nursi’s attitude towards *fitnahs*, not *fitnah*, because, as there are seven different classifications of *fitnahs*, as shown in Table 1, Nursi’s attitude and demeanor towards them differs according to the type of *fitnah*. Therefore, it would be more appropriate to examine Nursi’s attitude and demeanor towards each type of *fitnah* under separate headings. However, while evaluating Nursi’s attitude and demeanor towards *fitnahs*, it is necessary to take into account a few issues. First of all, as stated above, Nursi divides the first 40-45 years of his life into Old Said and the rest as New Said. Nursi,



The Meaning of the Concept of <i>Fitnah</i>	Frequency of Use
The Antichrist, irreligion, materialism and all kinds of philosophical and political movements against monotheistic religions that will emerge in the world of humanity at the end of times	31 times (<i>Rays</i> : 356, 433, 717, 719, 726, 839, 851, 895, 910; <i>Barla Addendum</i> : 213, 215, 417, 459; <i>First Period Books</i> : 361, 374, 376, 574; <i>Letters</i> : 660; <i>Kastamonu Addendum</i> : 103, 133, 176, 230; <i>The Flashes</i> : 729)
Making mischief in society, disrupting public order	29 times (<i>Signs of Miraculousness</i> : 136, 146, 148, 151, 160, 164; <i>The Words</i> : 1031, 1037; <i>First Period Books</i> : 358, 577; <i>Letters</i> : 147, 158, 159, 230, 381, 686, 690; <i>The Flashes</i> : 54, 64, 65, 66, 169; <i>Tarihçe-i Hayat</i> : 283, 290)
Religious turmoil, separation based on faith	12 times (<i>Rays</i> : 432; <i>Barla Addendum</i> : 232; <i>Letters</i> : 145, 512, 689; <i>Emirdağ Addendum</i> : 263, 264, 266)
War and massacre	11 times (<i>Rays</i> : 351, 513, 879; <i>Letters</i> : 149, 153)
Tempting, seductive factors, environments, situations	7 times (<i>The Words</i> : 207, 213; <i>Rational Arguments</i> : 102; <i>Kastamonu Addendum</i> : 198; <i>Emirdağ Addendum</i> : 514, 518)
Sufyanism, which will emerge in Islamic society at the end of times and will try to abolish the Shari'ah of Muhammad	4 times (<i>Rays</i> : 718, 723, 726)
Murder, individual manslaughter	1 time (<i>Rays</i> : 606)

TABLE 1. The Use of the Concept of *Fitnah* in the *Risale-i Nur* Collection.



who has a natural feature of being against injustice, tyranny, and oppression since childhood (Uyanık, 2015: 152), was more involved in social life, directly intervening in events and having an activist attitude during the Old Said period. However, in the New Said period, he devoted all his time and energy to the writing of the *Risale-i Nur* Collection and the service of faith. This new period is not a passivity, but an effort to focus on the service of faith and the Qur'an with full concentration, avoiding all kinds of worldly, social, and political preoccupations.

Secondly, Nursi's primary purpose in the service of faith and the Qur'an, and the main mission he attributed to the *Risale-i Nur*, is to help save the eternal hereafter lives by teaching the truths of faith to the believers and everyone in need. He looks at this world and social life in the second degree and indirectly. However, according to Nursi, since the Nur treatises teach faith and good deeds, they also serve to ensure public order, peace, unity, and alliance in social life (*Emirdağ Addendum*, 2019: 44).

Thirdly, while examining the relationship between *fitnah* and social fragility from Nursi's point of view, it is necessary to take into account Nursi's emphasis on the difference between European/Western societies and Asian/Islamic societies. According to Nursi, it is a sign of divine providence that throughout the history of humanity, prophets generally came to Asia and most of the philosophers grew up in Europe. Accordingly, the fundamental value that will awaken, develop, and govern Asian societies is *religion and the heart*. Philosophy and wisdom, on the other hand, are secondary, helping religion and the heart. Whereas in Europe, philosophy, and wisdom rule in the first degree (*Letters*, 2019: 455). In Islamic society, if a Muslim who has learned all the values from Prophet Muhammad, breaks away from these values, he cannot be attached to any other value judgment and becomes a poison for the society. However, the same is not true for non-Muslims. Even if s/he is non-religious, he can carry some virtues that are beneficial to social life (*ibid.*: 619). In that case, the erosion and



degeneration of religious values will create fragility in Islamic society, which will be different from the consequences it will have in European/Western society.

a) Nursi's attitude against "The Antichrist, irreligion, materialism and all kinds of philosophical and political movements against monotheistic religions that emerged in the world of humanity at the end of times": As stated above, the irreligious movements that will emerge in the end of times and the Antichrist, found a wide place in hadith books, especially in the *Kutub al-Sittah* (Six Books). It can be said that the *Risale-i Nur* Collection, which was written by Nursi, is the embodiment of his attitude towards this *fitnah* because the most basic motivation of Nursi in writing his works is to prevent the penetration of Western materialism and atheism into Islamic culture (Mardin, 1992: 20). According to Nursi, one of the most important causes of social fragility and conflict is these irreligious and harmful currents because the administration of ten irreligious and immoral people, especially in Islamic society, is more difficult than the administration of a thousand religious people in terms of maintaining social peace and public order (*Letters*, 2019: 619). Since the social result of these harmful currents is anarchism, it is necessary to create barriers like the Great Wall of Dhu'l-Qarnayn in the hearts with the truths of faith and the Qur'an (*The Staff of Moses*, 2019: 320).

According to Nursi, in ancient times, irreligion and heresy stemmed from ignorance and it was easy to remove. However, especially after the Enlightenment, irreligion and heresy started to come from knowledge, science, and philosophy (Aydın, 2019: 14) and it became difficult to remove them. Nur treatises were written with the mission of combating irreligion and heresy, especially this second kind, and according to Nursi, it fully fulfils this mission (*Emirdağ Addendum*, 2019: 45).

Nursi is not categorically against modern sciences, nor does he see them in conflict with the truths of the Qur'an. On the contrary, he states that each branch of positive science is a guide that



leads to knowledge and understanding of the manifestations of God's names (Aydin, 2019: 2). This statement summarizes Nursi's approach to sciences: "Of course, humanity will pour into knowledge and sciences at the end of times. He will take all his strength from science. Judgment and power will pass into the hands of knowledge" (Mardin, 1992: 321). However, he objects that the knowledge about existence and the universe obtained through science is used as a way of denying God, under the despotism of secular ideology and atheism. At this point, it can be said that Nursi's demeanor and attitude in the face of this great *fitnah*, which expresses a process rather than a specific event or situation, is the service of faith he gives with the Nur treatises.²

b) Nursi's attitude against "making mischief in society, disrupting public order": When the *Risale-i Nur* Collection is examined, it is seen that Nursi was extremely sensitive and careful against this type of *fitnah*, and kept his students constantly vigilant to maintain *public order* (*Kastamonu Addendum*, 2019: 159; *Rays*, 2019: 427). There are some justified reasons for this sensitivity in Nursi. First of all, Nursi, who is a *natural target* for the new Turkish administration, meticulously avoids giving the state a trump card against him and the Nur movement. However, ironically, despite this, he could not avoid dealing with courts and prisons on charges of "possibility of disturbing the public order". At the end of these long years of trials and imprisonment, all his works were examined by a committee of experts in 1956, and all his works (The *Risale-i Nur* Collection) were returned to him with a court decision stating that they did not contain any harmful content for the society and the state (Vahide, 2010: 341).

On the other hand, one of the most important issues that prompted Nursi to be vigilant about maintaining public order is the cruel principle in this age's politics "to crush many innocent supporters of a person because of his mistake" (*Rays*, 2019: 466). Nursi saw very painful examples of how this cruel principle of politics was practiced in events such as the two world wars, the



March 31 Incident, Sheikh Said, Menemen and Dersim. Therefore, he kept the Nur movement away from mass actions, street movements and even legitimate politics, with the tenet of *positive action* that he frequently emphasized because, according to Nursi, positive action arising from faith and good deeds is the most important factor in preventing fragility, as well as being the basis of social integration, peace, and balance (Turner and Horkuc, 2009: 101).

According to Nursi, the *fitnah* of creating mischief in society and disrupting public order does not always occur with social actors. Sometimes, freemasons, atheists, and hypocrites, who are influential in or can direct this state power, can attract any community or mass to a *fitnah* they have designed, and thus prepare the ground for the destruction of that community or mass. Nursi interestingly deciphers this situation, which we can call *fictionalized strife*, in the 13th Ray in his treatise called *Rays*;

“My Dear, Loyal Brothers!

Your constancy and steadfastness foil all the plans of the Masons and dissemblers. Yes, my brothers, there is no need to hide it, those atheists draw comparisons between the Risale-i Nur and its students and the Sufi orders and particularly the Naqshbandi Order, and with the idea of refuting us and scattering us, attack us with the schemes with which they defeated the Sufis.

Firstly: To intimidate and scare, and show up the abuses of the Sufi way.

And secondly: To publicize the faults of its leaders and followers.

And thirdly: To corrupt them with the enticing vices and stupefying, pleasurable poisons of materialist philosophy and civilization; and destroy their solidarity; and disparage their leaders with treacherous lies; and discredit their ways with some of the principles of science and philosophy. They attacked us with the same weapons they used against the Naqshbandis and Sufis, but they were deceived. For since the essence of the Risale-i Nur’s way is complete sincerity, and the giving up of egotism, and to search out and perceive the mercy



within difficulties and the permanent pleasures within pains, and to point out the grievous pains within fleeting dissolute pleasures, and that belief is the means to innumerable pleasures in this world too, and to teach the points and truths that the hand of no philosophy can reach, God willing, it will make all their plans come to nothing, and showing that no comparison can be made between the way of the Risale-i Nur and the Sufi orders, it will silence them utterly” (Rays, 2019: 399).

Considering that the *Risale-i Nur* movement, unlike the Sufi orders, is not person-centered but book-based, Nursi points out that these constructed *fitnahs* will not disband the Nur movement.

c) Nursi’s attitude against “religious turmoil, separation based on faith”: One of the issues that increase fragility in societies and trigger divisions to conflict is differences in religious affiliation, interpretation, and understanding (Marc et al, 2013: 107). Nursi states that in the history of Islam, turmoil and conflict for purely religious reasons have been experienced only once or twice (*Letters*, 2019: 617). Therefore, according to Nursi, many other turmoils recorded as “religious reasons” in terms of Islamic history are based on political, military, or other reasons. However, it is always possible for potential *fitnah* to arise for religious reasons, and it is necessary to be careful.

According to Nursi, religious communities and groups are an innate result of differences in temperament among people and wealth. After uniting in the main purpose of serving in the way of Allah, the differences in methods will not harm and will give people effort and motivation for common problems (*First Period Books*, 2010: 75). Moreover, Nursi not only encouraged love and alliance between religious groups in the Islamic society but also insisted on the unity and alliance between Muslims and the People of the Book (*ahl al-kitāb*). While interpreting the verse of the Qur’an “Do not take the Jews and Christians as friends” (5:51), he emphasized that this verse is not a general rule for all times but is specific to the age of the Prophet. He stated that it is not for-



bidden to have friends with a Jew or a Christian because of their attributes, arts, and human characteristics, but on the contrary, the Islamic world needs it (ibid.: 473). With this interpretation, which can be considered quite brave in terms of Islamic thought, Nursi wanted to prevent religious differences from turning into conflict and *fitnah*.

As an example of Nursi's attitude towards the type of *fitnah* stemming from the differences in religious interpretation, we can give Nursi's answer and wording to the criticism of Naqshi Sheikh Abdulkakim Arvasi about the Nur treatises. In his work called *Rays* (2019: 837-884), Nursi made inferences using *abjad* and *jifr* that some verses in the Qur'an specifically point to the *Risale-i Nur* from the type of sign. Arvasi, on the other hand, stated that such an inference cannot be made and that such an interpretation of the verses of the Qur'an is wrong, and severely criticized Nursi and his works (Badilli, 1998: 1103). The objection and criticism made by Arvasi did not find a very important social consideration and did not have a significant effect. However, the timing and style of this objection and the fact that it was wanted to be used by those who were against the Nur movement greatly upset and affected Nursi.

We can summarize Nursi's attitude towards the objection made by Arvasi as follows;

- First of all, he did not hide his sadness and resentment about the timing, style, and content of the objection, and he openly expressed this.
- He explained the issues that were the subject of the objection in terms of the interpretation methodology and did not leave the objection unanswered and unexplained.
- He asked Arvasi to work on repairing the misunderstandings and damage caused by this objection and to help them with his prayer.



- Nursi felt the need to warn the students of the *Risale-i Nur* regarding the issue and emphasized the drawbacks of responding to the objections and criticisms in the same manner and style.
- Perhaps due to the possibility of similar or more horrific responses from different movements in the future, expressing his greater concern on the occasion of this event, Nursi stated that it is necessary to respond in a respectful tone, and by maintaining composure, without being shaken, without engaging in hostile attitudes. More importantly, he expressed the need to refrain from discrediting religious leaders from different movements or denominations in order not to give a trump card to the people of heresy and not to increase the *fitnah* because such an attitude will shake the faith of the common believers who are attached to that religious leader with goodwill and will fuel the fire of *fitnah* (*Kastamonu Addendum*, 2019: 198-243).

According to Nursi, adopting an attitude other than this style may lead to the growth of such *fitnahs*, perhaps to turmoils that amount to violence and conflict. With this stance, Nursi also outlined how the social fragility arising from differences in religious interpretation can be alleviated before it turns into a conflict. Finally, the Arvasi issue was closed before it grew further and turned into an important crisis.³

d) Nursi's attitude against "war and massacre": As stated above, Nursi personally participated in the First World War and was captured by the Russians while he was fighting on the Eastern Front as a volunteer militia commander on behalf of the Ottoman Empire. Before the Balkan and Tripoli Wars, then Turkey's war of independence and then the Second World War, in which Turkey did not directly participate, but was seriously affected, coincided with Nursi's lifetime. Therefore, Nursi lived and experienced what war means for societies and humanity with the most severe and



painful examples. Maybe this is why, for example, after the start of the Second World War, he did not follow any news about the war, did not listen to the radio and did not ask anyone. He gave the following answer to his students who were surprised by this situation and asked why:

“The people who are struggling today are the recipients of the Qur’an’s verse, “Man is undoubtedly very cruel” (14:34) in the most horrific degree. Therefore, it is not permissible to be a supporter of them, or to follow those currents with curiosity, to listen to their false and deceptive propaganda, to watch their bitter struggles, perhaps even to look at those strange atrocities because consent to cruelty is cruelty; if it is a supporter, it will be cruel” (Kastamonu Addendum, 2019: 257).

With this statement, Nursi draws attention to the sensitivity to be shown towards news/information sources in order not to be exposed to propaganda and disinformation and not to be a tool/partner in *fitnah* in our age when mass media become widespread. In addition, Nursi points to the difference between information and knowledge, which Stehr also emphasizes (2021), and the awareness required to obtain them.

Nursi did not hesitate to fight when necessary against the invasion or disintegration of his homeland by a foreign country (Saritoprak, 2008: 398). According to Nursi, however, the main thing is peace, and the age we live in is not the age of tyranny with the sword and gun, but the age of persuasion with the pen and knowledge because in this age, the power is in science, in knowledge (Mardin, 1992: 321, *First Period Books*, 2019: 391). However, in the atmosphere of war, brute force starts to speak instead of pen and science, and rights and laws are lost under a kind of military tyranny (Tarihçe-i Hayat: 2019: 528).

Another point that Nursi underlines is that pointing weapons at each other and committing massacres within the country is an attitude that can never be seen as legitimate, whatever the reason. It is strongly opposed to external attacks, but domesti-



cally, reforms should be made only with positive action and sincerity (*Emirdağ Addendum*, 2019: 631). There are two important examples in Nursi's life in this regard: the 31 March Incident and the Sheikh Said Event. Nursi personally witnessed the 31 March Incident. Ottoman capital in Istanbul, after the declaration of the Second Constitutional Monarchy, the unrest in the society and the military finally turned into action with actual provocations, and on March 31, 1909 (April 12, 1909) according to the Rumi calendar, turmoil began. The lower-ranking soldiers rebelled and locked the high-ranking officers in their rooms, surrounded the parliament with the participation of *madrasah* students and the public, and listed their demands with the slogan "We want *shari'ah*". The rebellion was suppressed by the Action Army from Salonica, the city was dominated, but many civilians and soldiers lost their lives (Vahide, 2010: 92-93). In the military court established after the suppression of the rebellion, 70 people, including Derviş Vahdeti, who participated in the rebellion, were executed, and Said Nursi, who was tried in the same court, was acquitted after a long defense. In his defense, Nursi explained in detail how the incident was prepared with a planned provocation, his speeches and orations to calm the incident, and the purposes for which this incident was used⁴ (*First Period Books*, 2019: 379-408). According to Kutay, this event was used by the Union and Progress Party as a *cleaning and liquidation* operation (Şahiner, 218: 345).

We see another attitude of Nursi against bloodshed and massacre in the Sheikh Said Incident. In the newly established Republic administration, the presence of names that are distant and even opposed to Islam and some anti-religious actions led to unrest, especially in the eastern tribes (Sayılğan and Sayılğan, 2011: 245). Prepared for an armed movement in this atmosphere, Sheikh Said wanted to get Nursi's influence and support behind him. Against Sheikh Said's request for support, Nursi said, "*The Turkish nation has been the standard bearer of Islam for centuries. He has brought many saints and martyrs out of him. A sword cannot be drawn*



against the children of such a nation!” and gave a refusal with his statements.⁵ However, the Sheikh Said Incident started, the incident was suppressed as a result of the conflicts that lasted for two months, and those who participated in the movement were sentenced to imprisonment, exile, and death sentences. Nursi, on the other hand, was exiled to Burdur after the events, although he did not participate in the event, did not support, and even saved the lives of many people by preventing participation in the events around Van (Turner and Horkuc, 2009: 22).

As seen in both the March 31 and Sheikh Said events, Nursi did not allow the struggle to use weapons and violence. In this respect, Nursi differs from many contemporary *Islamist* thinkers, who see it as legitimate to change the society or state order in the name of Islam by using violence/force (Turner and Horkuc, 2009: 99). This is because, according to him, if the purpose of a person or movement is to serve Islam, the means and methods used to achieve this goal must also be legitimate and in accordance with Islam (Sözler, 2019: 983-984).

e) **Nursi’s attitude against “Tempting, seductive factors, environments and situations”**: According to Nursi, the age we live in is an age in which people willingly and lovingly prefer the world to the hereafter. Even believers who believe in the hereafter cannot help choosing this world in the face of *the tempting corruption of this century* (Rays, 2019: 882). The tempting *fitnah* in question is all kinds of illegitimate acts that God has made illicit, and the environment and situations that prepare the ground for these acts.

According to Nursi, some currents of irreligion and heresy that virtually wage war against Islam, by encouraging obscenity and exhibitionism through women and youth, undermine the institution of marriage and family and pave the way for prostitution (*The Comparisons of Belief and Unbelief*, 2019: 207). This situation destroys the family institution, which is the most important carrier of social integration and balance. While Nursi reflects on this *fitnah* and its harm to the people of faith in Eskişehir Prison,



he tells about his imaginary debate with a spiritual person who spread and encourages this *fitnah*. When this spiritual person said, “*We want to taste all kinds of flavors and pleasures of life and let everyone taste it, do not interfere with us.*” Nursi states that people are exposed to the anxieties and worries of both the past and the future through the mind and that these anxieties and worries deepen with disbelief, reducing the present taste of man to nothing. Man can endure these pains and worries only with faith and respond with the light of belief (Rays, 2019: 266). Otherwise, it is quite possible to see the fate of people who spent their youth and lives in pursuit of illegitimate ambitions from hospitals, prisons, taverns, and graveyards (ibid.: 271).

It is because of these terrible conditions of the time for believers that, according to Nursi, those who commit obligatory religious duties and abandon major sins at this time are saved. Nursi’s advice against these *fitnahs* that threaten the people of faith is to support each other by forming, so to say, a spiritual company in good deeds, provided that they maintain their sincerity (*Kastamonu Addendum*, 2019: 186). Thus, each individual will be able to gain spiritual resistance against these *fitnahs*, by feeling the power of the prayer and worship of each believing brother who is a partner in this spiritual company, as well as their prayer and worship.

f) Nursi’s attitude against “Sufyanism, which will emerge in the Islamic society at the end of times and will try to abolish the Shari’ah of Muhammad”: From the point of view of the social and political history of Muslims, it is possible to say that the most terrible and dramatic change took place with the First World War. The disintegration of the Ottoman Empire, which consolidated a large part of the Muslim world and represented the Caliphate, the emergence of new states, many of which are in conflict and hostile, the abolition of the Caliphate by the newly established Republic of Turkey and the transition to radical secularism represent a very traumatic sequence for Muslims. Nursi dealt with the hadiths



pointing to all these horrific events within the interpretation of the verse “*The conditions for it (Doomsday) have come*” (47:17). Thus, Nursi, on the one hand, aims to eliminate the hesitations of the common believers about these hadiths, and on the other hand, to eliminate the objections of the people of misguidance to the *mutashābih* (allegorical) hadiths that point to the end of times (Rays, 2019: 714).

According to Nursi, the hadiths regarding the events of the end of times point to two separate Dajjals, one being the great Dajjal (Antichrist) who will appear in the Christian world and the world of humanity, and the other the minor Dajjal who will appear in the Muslim world. The one who appears in the Muslim world is called Sufyān (ibid.: 718). While the Antichrist will wage war against the divine religions with political and philosophical movements such as atheism, communism, and materialism in the wide world of humanity, Sufyān will wage war against the Shari‘ah of Prophet Muhammad in the Muslim world and will act with maximum tyranny, cruelty, violence and horror (ibid.: 729).

The statements made by Nursi within the scope of the explanation of the hadiths about Sufyān largely point to Mustafa Kemal Atatürk and his actions. This is why Nursi was arrested in 1943 with 126 of his students due to the treatise in question, the 5th Ray, and was put in Denizli prison. However, they were acquitted and released after a nine-month detention and trial (Horkuc, 2004: 121-122).

Nursi, in a defense he made within the scope of the Afyon Court, said, “*I saw some of the news given by the original of the Fifth Ray in a man (Mustafa Kemal) there (in Ankara). I left those very important duties out of necessity. And I spent my time to save faith alone, leaving the world and politics and social life, saying, ‘This man cannot be dealt with, cannot be defeated.’*” With these expressions, he clearly points out that the Sufyān mentioned in the hadiths is Mustafa Kemal (Rays, 2019: 463). The expression “fighting with the service of faith, instead of retaliating through



politics” used by Nursi here summarizes his attitude and strategy against the *fitnah* of Sufyān. Therefore, Nursi preferred the struggle with *faith service* as a purely civil society movement instead of a political organization against the Kemalist regime.

g) Nursi’s attitude against “murder, individual manslaughter”: Considering Nursi’s attitude and demeanor towards *fitnahs*, which we have discussed so far, it will not be difficult to estimate his attitude against *murder and individual manslaughter*. Except for self-defense, Nursi did not allow any action that could cause death. His sensitivity to *positive action* and maintaining order determines his approach to this issue. While faith in man will manifest in the world as good deeds, positive actions and maintaining order, blasphemy and heresy will manifest themselves in the form of anarchy and terror in ideas, morals, and life (Horkuc, 2004: 209). For this reason, it has not tolerated any form of violence for any reason, even in the name of religion or *jihad*. According to him, the material sword has been sheathed and time is the time to fight with the spiritual diamond swords of the Qur’an (*The Staff of Moses*, 2019: 116). Moreover, resorting to violence to convey Islam stems from the weakness of self-confidence in one’s religion and values (Markham and Pirim, 2011: 53).

In a letter he wrote to his students in Afyon Prison, Nursi warns about the inmates imprisoned for murder. After such an unacceptable crime is committed, the continuation of this incident by turning into a blood feud, with grudges and hatred, will turn life into a spiral of fear and anger for both parties. Whereas, the Qur’an, rights, truth, Islam, humanity, and the public interest require the parties to reconcile and forgive each other (*Rays*, 2019: 606). With this advice, Nursi tried to prevent an individual murder from turning into *fitnah*, socializing and causing fragility with feelings of hatred and revenge.

Nursi did not adopt violence as a method while he was alive, and he wanted his students to maintain the same care and caution in this matter after his death. As a matter of fact, in the last lesson



he gave to his students before his death as testamentary, he thus said: “*I recommend that none of my students has the slightest desire for revenge against those who persecute us and that they work with loyalty and perseverance to the Risale-i Nur*” (Emirdağ Addendum, 2019: 454).

In his *Risale-i Nur* Collection, Nursi includes an interesting description that summarizes his attitude and demeanor against the seven different types of *fitnahs* that we have tried to express above. The journey of humanity from history to the present has entered a dirty swamp in this century. While the majority of humanity is walking in this dirty and stinking swamp (in misguidance and unbelief), in the dark, twenty percent of them think that dirty mud is musk due to drunkenness, and they suffocate. Eighty percent are aware of the swamp, mud, and stench, but they are confused and cannot find the way out (guidance). In this case, it will be necessary to either sober up the 20 percent by hitting it with the political mace or to save the majority by showing the light of the Qur’an. Expressing that he prefers the light of the Qur’an (*Risale-i Nur* Collection) over all kinds of political currents, instead of the political mace, Nursi emphasizes the method he follows against *fitnahs*. Otherwise, the sobriety to be made through politics will be temporary and fruitless (*Letters*, 2019: 80-81).

Nursi interestingly summarizes in nine points how *fitnahs* and the supporters of mischief who pioneered them were successful in destroying and defeating the guidance. “*I myself have frequently observed that mischief-makers, who form ten per cent, defeat the righteous, who form ninety per cent. I used to be astonished and curious. Investigating, I understood certainly that their victory results not from power, but from (1) corruption, (2) baseness, (3) destruction, (4) taking advantage of differences among the people of truth, sowing conflict among them, (5) playing on their weak traits of character and grafting them with such traits, and (6) exciting the emotions of the soul and personal hatred, and (7) through working the evil capacities in human nature which are like mines*



of corruption, and (8) through hypocritically flattering the soul's tyranny in the name of fame and glory, and (9) through everyone fearing their unfeeling destruction." (*The Flashes*, 2019: 156-157). But in the final analysis, according to Nursi, misfortunes, calamities and disasters are tests and a means of giving the innocent and oppressed the eternal reward of the hereafter. Since everything in the universe is the manifestation of God's beautiful names, everything is beautiful. Some of them are beautiful by themselves (*hüsn-ü bizzat*), while others are beautiful in terms of their results (*hüsn-ü bilgayr*), which is how mischief and misfortunes are (*The Words*, 2019: 314). With these tests, the diamond-spirited Abu Bakr the Veracious and the coal-spirited Abu Jahl are revealed, and the wisdom of creation is manifested (*ibid.*: 242). Again, with these exams, the individual and social body gains spiritual immunity, become stronger, and fulfils the duty of mirrors for the names of God (*The Flashes*, 2019: 347).

On the other hand, according to Nursi, tricks and *fitnahs* affect, damage and trigger fragility as long as they remain under the curtain; that is, as long as their nature is not fully understood by society. When it emerges, when its nature is understood, it goes bankrupt and its power fades (*First Period Books*, 2010: 453). In that case, the most important way to neutralize tricks and *fitnahs* is transparency, social awareness, and efforts to increase this awareness at the community/group/state level.

EVALUATION AND CONCLUSION

From a sociological point of view, *fragility* refers to the state of society between balance, harmony/integration and conflict/fragmentation. It is estimated that at least a quarter of the world's population today lives under conditions considered fragile (Marc et al, 2013: 11). For these societies, fragility, which expresses a process rather than a temporary crisis, may increase or decrease



depending on many factors such as migrations, globalization, change, ethnic-political-cultural-religious differences.

Sociology deals with the types, causes and consequences of social fragility today as it was yesterday. The general tendency in literature is to explain fragility as a state weakness. However, some studies show that complex social factors also have an impact on fragility. Although fragility has been discussed in many ways, we do not see any study in the literature – also in the sociology of religion – on the relationship between social fragility and *fitnah*, which is a concept of Islamic thought tradition. However, the fact that most of the societies that are considered to be fragile have a Muslim-dense population makes it necessary to examine the relationship between *fitnah* and fragility. In this sense, our study has originality in the sense that the said relationship is questioned through Said Nursi's attitude against *fitnah*.

Nursi, as an Islamic scholar who witnessed the period and geography he lived in, the events he faced and almost every disaster that could fit in a person's life, is a figure whose attitude and demeanor against *fitnah* should be carefully examined. In this context, to summarize Nursi's attitude and demeanor against *fitnahs*:

- There is a strong relationship between *fitnahs* and social fragility. To preserve social integrity and harmony, societies, especially Muslim societies, need to be extremely vigilant and careful against corruption.
- Since belief is the highest truth in the universe, the greatest *fitnah* of humanity is that which threatens belief. In this sense, the greatest *fitnah* for humanity and especially for Muslim societies are philosophical and political movements based on the denial of divinity such as the Antichrist, irreligion, materialism, and communism. With the destruction done by these currents, if belief, which is the source of human feelings such as compassion and virtue, leaves the heart of the person, the way for anarchism will be opened



and conflict and anarchy will become inevitable beyond social fragility. The greatest struggle and attitude against this *fitnah* is to teach people the truths of belief and the Qur'an in accordance with the requirements and language of the age. Thus, each individual will be included in social life with good deeds and cooperation by maintaining their faith. However, to cope with this great *fitnah* at the end of times, there is a need for an alliance between Muslims and true religious Christians.

- Disruption of public order and laying the groundwork for social conflict is one of the most common forms of *fitnah* that fosters fragility. Especially in societies where law and democracy are not established with all their institutions and rules, since the principle of “to crush many innocent supporters of a person because of his mistake” dominates politics and the universal rule of “individuality of criminal responsibility” is violated, attitudes and behaviors that may ignite violent incidents should be carefully avoided. This attitude is not giving up demanding the better for the individual and society but expressing this demand through legitimate means and methods. The best attitude in this regard is to continue to teach the truths of belief and the Qur'an with the principle of *positive action*. In this sense, Nursi aims at the evolutionary, not revolutionary, improvement of societies.
- In religious-based turmoil and disunity, it is enough to make the necessary explanations on the scientific ground, without causing *fitnah* to grow by way of retaliation. Trying to discredit the leaders of religious opinion by producing polemics in a way that will give leverage to the people of heresy will hurt the believers who set their hearts on those leaders and will sow the seeds of mutual hatred and enemy. In addition, Muslims should build their relations not only among themselves but also with the People of the Book,



based on civilized friendship and cooperation, taking into account the conditions and requirements of the age.

- The main value in our age is peace and reconciliation. The force is not in swords and weapons but in knowledge and science. Especially within a country, it is never acceptable to engage in an armed struggle, except for self-defense. The supreme truths of Islam and the Qur'an are sufficient for spiritual jihad in this century. Also, there is no need for brute force.
- Illegal tastes and ways that seduce people have never been as diverse and easily accessible as in this century. It is necessary to respond to them with faith and good deeds, to stay in the *halal* circle, which is sufficient for pleasure, and to help each other with prayer.
- In order not to be exposed to propaganda and disinformation through mass media, it is necessary to be extremely sensitive in the selection and follow-up of news/information sources. The pursuit of useless information that makes people forget about their primary duty, servitude (*'ibādah*), will eventually turn people into the object of fictional mischief instead of being the subject of their own life.
- Even if it provides temporary benefits, following the path of politics in warning people and guidance against *fitnahs* will not be permanent. The main effective and permanent way and method is to show people the truth and the reality with sincerity without seeking anything other than the consent of God, by avoiding politics.
- Because destruction is easy, those who initiate *fitnah* and mischief achieve results by using human weakness and fueling conflicts, not because they have great strength or might. In order not to fall into this trap, it is necessary to act with great care, vigilance, and awareness.
- Just as diseases serve the immunity of the human body and the *Shafī'* (Curer) name of Allah, *fitnahs* and calamities,



as a result, serve the development of individual and social immunity and the manifestations of the names of God Almighty. Since beauty is absolute and evil and ugliness is relative in the universe, very good and beautiful results are hidden under the apparent ugliness of *fitnahs* and misfortunes. Some of these results will be manifested in this world and some in the hereafter. It is necessary to think about the realization of these auspicious results with patience, prayer, and endurance in times of *fitnah*.

- While tricks and *fitnahs* affect the individual and society as long as they remain under the curtain when they emerge and their nature is understood, they go bankrupt, and their power goes out. In that case, the most important way to neutralize tricks and *fitnahs* is to build transparency, social awareness, and a common mind at the community/group/state level.

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NOTES

1. Although strife and sedition can be used in a close sense, the word *fitnah* does not have an exact equivalent in English. In this study, we preferred to use the original Arabic version of the word.
2. Nursi repeatedly included in his works the alliance of religious Christians and Muslims against the materialist, communist and atheist movements, which he describes as the Antichrist, and the subordination of the Bible to



the Qur'an, within the scope of the explanation of some hadiths because, according to Nursi, Muslims and Christians cannot fight against these negative currents separately (*The Flashes*: 256; *First Period Books*: 543; *Rays*: 714; *Letters*: 26). This determination and diagnosis constitute one of the important features that distinguish him from other Islamic scholars.

3. Nursi, in his treatises titled *Twentieth and Twenty-First Flash*, has extensively discussed the issues that should be considered especially by communities and groups acting for religious service, while carrying out these services and in their relations with each other. The principles to act against the *fitnah* of "religious turmoil, separation based on faith" are detailed in these two treatises (*Flashes*, 2019: 252-279).

4. This defence of Nursi was published under the name of "İki Mekteb-i Musibetin Şehadetnamesi veya Divan-ı Harb-i Örfî" (1911). In his defence, Nursi examined in detail how the conditions of March 31 were prepared to step by step as a result of the power struggle within the state, how the incident was deliberately reduced to the slogan of "we want *shari'ah*" even though there were seven different reasons, and for what purposes it was used. As a matter of fact, with this event, the concept of *irtica* (reactionism) entered Turkish political history (Aslan, 2010: 2), and in the following years this concept was used as a tool to suppress all kinds of Islamic demands.

5. In the same days, the following dialogue takes place between the tribal chief Kör Hüseyin Pasha who came to visit Nursi: "-Kör Hüseyin Pasha (KHP): *Master, my tribe has gathered, my infantry and cavalry are ready... Weapons, everything is ready. I besieged Van City with my five thousand soldiers. As soon as you order, I'll shoot right away.* – Nursi: *Pasha, can you tell me, with whom will you fight?* – KHP: *With Mustafa Kemal's soldiers!* – Nursi: *Who are Mustafa Kemal's soldiers?* – KHP: *I don't know, it's a soldier.* – Nursi: *No Pasha, the soldier is the son of this country. They are yours and my brother. Are you going to get Hasan to shoot Hüseyin and Ahmed to Mehmed? What's wrong with the soldier?* – KHP: *Master, I have made my decision, I am waiting for a permit from you!* – Nursi: *Pasha, if you cause this bloodshed, you will be held responsible in the sight of Allah!*" After this dialogue, Kör Hüseyin Pasha gave up the siege and movement (Atasoy, 2011: 190-191).

