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It Takes a Village to Raise a Child:
The Religious Socialization of Muslim Immigrant Children

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Abstract

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By Kemal Budak

This dissertation is a study of how Muslim immigrant families (parents and their children) engage in the religious socialization process. I investigate the process by conducting ethnographic research at three levels of analysis—(1) a comparison of three Muslim weekend schools (the macro level); (2) participant and non-participant observation and interviews with the parents of a weekend school (the meso level); and (3) an extensive case study of a Muslim immigrant family (the micro level). In the first level of analysis, I compare two multicultural and one monocultural (Turkish) weekend schools, in which each school embraces distinctive theologies, to see how they provide an Islamic education to students who are second-generation immigrants. That comparison demonstrates that the theology (e.g., “cool Islam” vs. “light Islam”) and, in turn, the Muslim identity conveyed by these schools (e.g., Muslim-American vs. Turkish-American) display notable variations. Moreover, the Muslim children at the schools are not passive audiences of the sophisticated religious socialization process, as they shape that process by displaying agency within or outside the classroom. At the other levels of analysis, I examine the religious socialization process through the eyes of Turkish families who are affiliated with the Gülen Movement—a transnational faith-based religious community. The findings from the interviews, participant observation, and case study reveal that parents go through different phases of religious socialization as their first child ages and when that first child is joined by other siblings. That is, religious socialization is not only a process, but it also a process that takes on distinctive styles within a family. In transferring a Muslim identity to their children, parents shift from an initial phase of highly structured efforts inside the household to a later phase of organic efforts inside the household paired with the assistance of the religious socialization efforts of others outside the home (such as weekend schools). Ultimately, this dissertation and its findings reveal the importance of approaching both religion and religious socialization as “lived” and dynamic activities.

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INTRODUCTION

Since the ratification of the Immigration and Nationality Act in 1965, Muslim immigration to the United States has increased dramatically (Haddad et al. 2003). Amidst that increase, Muslim immigrant parents have undertaken the difficult task of raising a new generation in the United States while making sure to transfer a Muslim identity to their children (Bebiroglu et al. 2015; Spiegler et al. 2016). They engage in this transfer process both on their own and with some outside help, including the help of religious institutions that create some continuity and connection between immigrant homelands and the now-host society of the US (Foner and Alba 2008).

This dissertation examines this transfer process (i.e., religious socialization) by focusing on an array of involved actors as they, in different settings, interact with each other to shape this ongoing religious socialization. To be more specific, I explore this transfer process experienced by second-generation Muslim immigrant children and by their first-generation parents as it occurs in both the home setting and the setting of weekend schools that provide Islamic and moral education to these children.

The dissertation particularly focuses on the *early* religious socialization that generally takes place between the ages of three and twelve, rather than the end product of that socialization, which is the religiosity or religious identity that emerges among these children after their middle school and high school years. While survey researchers sometimes focus on this “outcome” of religiosity (Mukhopadhyay 2011; Nelsen 1980), qualitative researchers have stressed the importance of the ongoing process of socialization—the activity that plays out in day-to-day fashion. Indeed, scholars like Allison Pugh (2011) remind us that important and consequential aspects of socialization play out in these early years. Given that it would take a longitudinal study to assess the

end results of the religious socialization process, engaging in such a study is not feasible for this dissertation; however, I also argue that religious socialization is an interactive process in which both *young* children and other socializing actors interact and negotiate with each other.

As a process, religious socialization takes place with the involvement of several types of actors—such as parents, parochial schools and their teachers (weekend schools, in our case), student peers, relatives (including their children), etc. These actors either strive to transmit their religious beliefs and values to the younger generation, or they interact with each other, as in the case of peers, to reinforce the learning process in their own fashion. However, the trajectory of each child’s religious socialization can vary and so can the reactions of children to these socialization efforts. Several factors contribute to this variation in trajectories and reactions—such as the degree of parental religiosity, the lifestyle and the worldview that parents prefer, the theology and the teaching style that weekend schools and their teachers adopt, as well as power struggles among the actors. Therefore, I will focus on an array of actors involved in this religious socialization at different levels of analysis. First, at a somewhat macro level, I compare three Muslim weekend schools operating under mosques or cultural centers located in three different Southeastern suburban areas. Secondly, at the meso level, I analyze the perspective of parents by using interviews I conducted with the parents of one weekend school. Finally, at the micro level, I observe one Muslim immigrant family up close to reveal the lived dynamics of the religious socialization process.

Theoretical Background

Religious Socialization

Religious socialization is “an interactive process through which social agents influence individuals’ religious beliefs and understandings” (Sherkat 2003:151). The word “process” implies that religious socialization is different from religious education. According to Cohen (1971: 22), education is about the “inculcation of standardized knowledge, skills, and values through stereotyped procedures,” whereas socialization involves the “implanting of behavioral patterns through continuous, spontaneous interaction with others in the social group.” This continuity means that socialization is very much a lived and ongoing process.

Children are socialized into a religion with the help of several actors, including families, relatives, peers, media, and parochial schools (Cornwall 1988). The family is generally considered the earliest (Hyde 1990) and the most influential actor in the religious socialization process (Acock 1984; Bader and Desmond 2006). The influence of family is emphasized so much that some have even asserted that religiosity, like social class, is inherited (Myers 1996). Indeed, parents can provide the foundation of their children’s religious identity, can become role models when teaching religious behaviors, and can act as the initial decision-makers about the religious education of their children (Regnerus et al. 2004). The transmission of religiosity not only takes place in childhood, but it also continues up through adult years (Martin et al. 2003).

For Greeley and Rossi (1966), home has more influence than a parochial school in terms of children’s religious development. Research on Jews (Himmelfarb 1977) and Lutherans (Johnstone 1966) supports these findings. Sometimes, there can be differences in terms of parents successfully transferring their religious preferences and

membership to their children. For example, evangelical parents have higher retention rates for their youth, in terms of their children remaining evangelicals themselves, when compared to retention rates of mainline Protestant parents (Smith 1998). Yet, as for American teens, they generally follow their parents' religious tradition instead of choosing another one (Smith 2005). Parents can transmit their religiosity to their children, and this transmission of religiosity is reinforced by other adults who share the same religion or level of religiosity (Uecker 2009). When children get older, peers can replace the parents and other adults in the community in terms of influence (Vaidyanathan 2011). But as Potvin and Lee (1982) point out, peer influence can be positive or negative. While some peers help maintain the religiosity of their friends, some others could exert negative influence.

In general, parental religiosity, spouse or peer religiosity, and religious education by the church are usually described as highly important agents of religious socialization (Greeley and Rossi 1966; Himmelfarb 1977, 1979). Despite the existence of these actors, Hart (1990: 75) has found that they could only become relevant in combination with the "religious atmosphere of the parental home." When parents have a healthy and happy relationship with their children, this further facilitates religious socialization (Ozorak 1989). Indeed, as part of his social learning theory, Bandura (1977) argues that children tend to emulate their parents when the latter act like a convincing role model. Parents belonging to the same faith or denomination, rather than diverging in their respective faiths, are more successful in religious socialization thanks to reinforcement of teachings (Myers 1996). Moreover, consistent messaging by the parents has a positive influence on the religiosity of children (Bader and Desmond 2006).

Which parent is more influential in religious socialization, be it the mother or the father, has been a debated issue. For Nelsen (1990) and Bao et al. (1999), it is the mother. But for Kieren and Munro (1987), it is the father who influences his children's level of religiosity. Similarly, Baker-Sperry (2001) has found that the father's influence is equally as strong as that of the mother. In general, though, public perception is on mother's side, either because mothers are usually more religious (Nelsen 1990) or because they generally spend more time with children at home (Lindsey 2015). However, it also can be asserted that mothers are more influential on religious practice, whereas fathers are more influential in terms of worship place attendance (Clark et al. 1988).

Distinct parenting styles can result in different socialization processes. Baumrind (1968, 1978) talks about four types of parenting styles: the authoritative style, the authoritarian style, the permissive style, and the rejecting/neglecting style. They are differentiated from each other in terms of demand and responsiveness. "Demand" means the expectation of parents that their child controls his or her behavior. "Responsiveness" refers to the sensitiveness of parents when considering their child's emotional and developmental needs. The authoritarian style is demanding, but not responsive. Parents lay out rules, and they demand obedience from their children. The authoritative style, in contrast, is both demanding and responsive, which means that parents explain why rules are necessary. Permissive parents are not demanding, but responsive. They are ready to fulfill their children's wishes. Parents with the rejecting style are not demanding or responsive, but rather, they are disconnected from their children. Baumrind (1997) later polished her argument by claiming that, despite the emphasis of authoritative parents on obedience, such parents make their parenting

more effective when they apply their demands in a responsive way. Using this classification, Wheeler (1991) has found that the authoritative parenting style produces self-reliant and content children, whereas authoritarian parenting raises withdrawn and discontent children. He also found that parents who practice the permissive style produce children who happened to be the least self-reliant, self-controlled, and explorative.

In the process of religious socialization, values, norms, and beliefs are exchanged between children/adolescents and various social agents (Hughes and Johnson 2001). As Petts argues (2015:97), religious socialization can affect children differently compared to other types of socialization thanks to the particular pressure children might feel in terms of faith and belief: Parents could use certain religious beliefs, like “eternal consequences” (Petts 2015: 95), to exert religious influence on their children. That being said, religious socialization also takes place through other methods. Imitation and modeling are frequently used in religious socialization. Parents, as key role models, display behaviors to their children; they are also the ones who allow other acceptable role models and limit the unacceptable ones (Grusec and Davidov 2007:300). Routines, rituals, rewards, punishments, and reasoning can also be added to the list of approaches used during the religious socialization process (Frisk et al 2018).

Given that various aspects of social life are dynamic, consisting of relationships, (Emirbayer 1997), children get connected to actors other than their parents—those actors who can play an important role in the process. For example, the media are one such actor (Currie 1997). The media are usually associated with such things as entertainment programming and advertisements, but the cultural products they produce are also part of the religious socialization process, as well. Among these cultural

products, for instance, children's books are extensively used for the religious socialization of the individual (Sigalow and Fox 2014). Thanks to their storytelling power, religious children's books can be impactful tools. Moral principles, historical and religious stories, and religious tenets are transmitted through these books. Parents, particularly when their children are of preschool age, employ these books to influence children's social and cultural beliefs and their behaviors (Kortenhaus and Demarest 1993).

Not all environments are equally conducive to religious socialization. In some settings, a child's religious socialization can stagnate for certain reasons. If a family is too dependent on a religious community, it can block or negatively influence a child's religious development (Armet 2009). According to Spilka et al. (1985), a religious enclave creates symbolic boundaries within which religious identity can be blunted if not stagnant. Others argue that marital instability and the rise of individualism have caused a decline in religious transmission (Bellah et al. 1985). Another hindrance to religious socialization is interfaith marriage, some argue, because couples belonging to different faith traditions have a hard time in keeping their own religious faith let alone in raising children in their own respective tradition (Voas 2003).

Although religious socialization is defined as an interactive process (Sherkat 2003), many studies (Gubar 2013; Kieren and Munro 1987; McCready 1975) have initially argued that agency, power, and voice lie in the hands of adults. According to Esser et al. (2017: 54), agency is socially produced and children are "embedded" (p.54) in a web of networks in which people, practices, and objects come together and shape *their* socialization process. These views emphasize that socialization is based on the domination, power, and authority of adults over children.

For the last two decades, however, other scholars have rejected the idea that children are nothing but blank slates (Christensen and James 1999; Handel, Cahill, and Elkin 2007; Mayall 2002; Turmel 2008; Wyness 2006). They argue that children are not the passive recipients of information during the socialization process, but rather, they also are agents of their own socialization, involved in the give-and-take between themselves and their parents (Maccoby 2015). This interactive process is called “bi-directionality” (Pinquart and Silbereisen 2004), and it suggests that both parents and children mutually influence each other (Grusec and Goodnow 1994). Socialization scholars argue that “social development is a product of continuous interactions between children and their family environments” (Kuczynski and Parkin 2007). According to Sameroff (1975:281), “The child alters his environment and in turn is altered by the changed world he has created.” This paragraph by Kuczynski and Parkin (2007:278) aptly summarizes the bi-directionality:

An implication of dynamic perspectives on socialization is that parents do not have the sort of direct effect on their children predicted in unidirectional models. Parents’ influence on children inherently occurs within a causal system that includes the influence and agency of children. Moreover, a dialectical view of causality would suggest that this influence is not deterministic, is mediated by parents’ and children’s complex interactions as agents and is moderated by changed interpretive processes and relationships. Bidirectional causality, whether construed as reciprocal exchanges of behavior or mutual dialectics is not a denial of parental influence but a statement that parental influence is complex and not deterministic. Parents play a role in influencing the general trajectory of children’s development and may be prepared to accept a considerable range of possibilities as acceptable outcomes.

This paragraph allows us to understand that the religious socialization process is a complex one that includes several moving parts. Both parents and children contribute to the process at different capacities and under different circumstances. As Adler and

Adler (1998:206) state, “Children do not perceive, interpret, form opinions about, or act on the world as unconnected individuals. Rather, they do all these things in concert with their peers, as they collectively experience the world.” Additionally, children negotiate the value and the meaning of the things around themselves, such as cultural products produced by the media (Pugh 2011).

Corsaro’s (1997) concept of “interpretive reproduction” nicely captures both unidirectional and bi-directional approaches in a subtle way. The concept suggests that children interpret the adult world and contribute to the cultural production (bi-directionality). It also implies that children are also “constrained (uni-directionality) by the existing social structure and by social reproduction” (Corsaro and Fingerson 2003:130). While interpreting adult culture, children simultaneously produce their own peer culture (Corsaro 1997).

The concept of bi-directionality, as well as that of interpretive reproduction, also reveals that religious conversations between parents and their adolescent children are common and that the latter engage in discussions, ask questions, and make comments (Boyatzis and Janicki 2003). Regarding the agency of children, Bales (2005) has studied Catholic second graders getting ready for their First Communion, and she elicited these children’s own interpretations of this first-time experience. Considering them as active participants, Bales concludes that children have the ability to think for themselves with their unique ideas and feelings independent of the adults.

This bi-directionality, whereby children are not simply passive, is also valid for Muslim children’s religious socialization. For example, studying the private religious education classes and centers in Tajikistan, Stephan (2010) has found that Tajik kids are not passive recipients of values and ideas imposed by parents and teachers. Instead,

students in these schools (or who took private instruction) interpret these religious lessons in their own ways. He also argues that “private religious lessons not only create a world of experience exclusive to young Muslims, but also provide a public space in which they are free to negotiate their religious attitudes and display morality and virtue” (Stephan 2010: 475).

In addition to the uni- and bi-directional models, there is also a third model called “channeling,” which contends that parents, in addition to their own socialization efforts, channel their children to religious communities where socialization takes place with other children and mentors. (Cornwall 1988). This model implies that religious socialization is now opened up to other influential actors when parents are insufficient in terms of religious knowledge or are too busy to deal with religious matters (Martin et al. 2003). This model also argues that parent’s direct effect on children’s religiosity decreases as children get older because parents channel their children to educational institutions and to people who are affiliated with those institutions (Francis and Brown 1991). I expect to find in this dissertation that parents and children will engage in both bi-directionality and channeling.

Parochial and Weekend Schools

Parochial schools, as significant actors in the religious socialization process, serve an important function. Thanks to their distinctive educational climate, these schools have their own independent influence in socialization despite the existence of parental influence (Hyde 1990). Led by Lutherans and Catholics during the earlier periods of American immigration, parochial schools have been around since the Colonial period (Numrich 2009). Schools opened by religious minorities served their purposes. Catholic

parochial schools, for example, particularly served two roles: to preserve the faith among Catholic immigrants and to prepare them to become American citizens (Lannie 1970). Greely and Rossi (1966) have also found Catholic schools to be influential in terms of inspiring the church attendance of those that they taught. Himmelfarb (1977) has come up with similar results for Jewish schools, when identifying four agents for the religious socialization of Jews: parents and their religiosity, Jewish spouses, Jewish schools, and Jewish organizations. Pennings et al. (2011) similarly have found that, when children attend parochial schools, they will be more likely to carry on their religious affiliation in later years.

As for Muslim parochial schools, their numbers used to be modest compared to the overall American mosque population of two decades ago. Only 20 percent of the mosques used to have a parochial school (Bagby et al. 2001). While we do not have current data on such schools, this percentage is likely on the rise, at least in the Southeastern city and its surroundings addressed by this dissertation, as almost all the suburban mosques in my dissertation research area have been running a weekend school. Muslim immigrant parents usually feel that they need to decide between academic success and moral/religious education when they choose between a public school and a parochial one. Harboring concerns about sex and violence in American public schools and having the desire to teach Islamic subjects, Muslim immigrants do not have much difficulty in finding motivation for the establishment of these schools (Khan et al. 2016). Their purpose has been to maintain their Islamic identity, but also to integrate it with the pluralistic American society (Barazangi 1991:172). Of course, parents can choose a parochial school for different reasons. Some parents want to continue their religious tradition in deliberate fashion, while some others' choices are

influenced by convenience that parochial schools offer (Hyde 1990)—filling in for parents who are too busy to transfer fully their religious knowledge to their children or who are lack sufficient religious knowledge.

Religion, Immigration, and Muslim Immigrants

Religion and immigration are interconnected topics in the American context. Many immigrants during the Colonial period escaped from religious persecution in Europe (Schmidt and Gaustad 2002). In subsequent decades, as immigration continued, new immigrants from different religious backgrounds shaped the fabric of American religious life (Balmer 2003; Díaz-Stevens 2003; McCloud 2003). Eventually, a distinct religiosity formed in the United States. Warner (1993) mentions several aspects of that American religiosity, but arguably the most obvious one is to equate being religious with being American. This makes the American immigration experience different from the European one. Meanwhile, the immigration policy of the United States government took a dramatic turn with the ratification of the 1965 Immigration Act (Gjelten 2015), which allowed the arrival of immigrants from different parts of the world. As a result, Muslim immigrants arrived in the United States in great numbers (McCloud 2003) in the post-1965 period.

Religion is significant for first-generation immigrants because religious institutions enable continuity between their homelands and the host society. Also, due to the cultural differences and the ensuing intergenerational negotiation, religious socialization requires more effort on the side of immigrants compared to non-immigrants. As Kwak (2003) notes, immigrant families actively negotiate the religious socialization process. Due to the existence of two cultures (that of homeland and the

host country), immigrant families strive to eliminate ambiguity when transmitting their religious beliefs and values. This makes immigrant families different from non-immigrant ones. Immigrants try to integrate their native-born children to their homeland's culture and religion while exerting effort for their own integration with the American society (Williams 1988). Furthermore, immigrant communities generally want to "institutionalize their common culture" (Doomernik 1995:47). This could be interpreted as a legitimization effort.

As immigrants perform or observe their religious duties, they can become more closely connected to their own ethnicity (Haddad and Lummis 1987; Warner 1993). According to Hirschman (2004:1228), religious membership functions as a refuge for immigrants who experience the hardship of adapting to a new country and a longing for their homeland. Religious organizations and places of worship allow immigrants to form connections and community by providing the social capital that they need (Ebaugh and Chafetz 2000; Portes and Rumbaut 2001). Consequently, as Ebaugh and Chafetz (2000) have stated in their seminal work, immigrants engage in a wide variety of activities that include celebrating their religious and cultural holidays, but they nonetheless make sure that "[A]s part of the integration, immigrants made changes in pragmatic values, but kept their core values" (Wakil et al. 1981:939).

Amid these integration efforts, it should be noted that another essential function of immigrant religious institutions is to serve as the "safe harbors" for youth, protecting them from "immoral habits" within American culture. For example, studying Vietnamese immigrants in New Orleans, Bankston and Zhou (1995) have argued that participation in ethnic religious organizations, not only helped protect youth from illegal and immoral acts, but also facilitated the youth's integration into their parents' ethnic

culture. Such patterns demonstrate that religious institutions have a double function in immigrant communities: facilitating the integration of first-generation immigrants to American society and providing a cultural and religious identity to the second-generation, or in the words of Foner and Alba (2008), “a sense of belonging.”

When it comes to the religious socialization of immigrant children, certain elements—such as a minority identity or following a non-Protestant or non-Christian religion (Islam) in a Protestant-dominant locale—play some role in the socialization process. People who belong to a minority religion attach great importance to the transmission of faith to subsequent generations. Immigrant families who value religion in their daily life do their best to keep their children in their own religious and cultural tradition by teaching religious and moral values (Maliepaard and Lubbers 2013:428). In the United States, many immigrants have also happened to be religious minorities in particular times and locations (e.g., Catholic, Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu), and they have generally strived to protect their religious identity. Catholics, for example, formed their own religious schools to counter the threat posed by the majority Protestant population (La Belle and Ward 1994; Rose 1988). They have also wanted to maintain their connection with their homeland (Rossi and Rossi 1961). Likewise, for immigrant Muslims in Muslim-minority countries, teaching Islamic rules and values to their kids is of paramount importance (Doomernik 1995; Verkuyten and Yildiz 2007).

The Need for This Dissertation

As mentioned above, social life is the sum of dynamic relations (Emirbayer 1997). Religion, as one of these dynamic relations, is understudied among topics related to the socialization of immigrant children. Some studies dealing with immigrant socialization

(Nauck 2001; Phalet and Schönplflug 2001) do not focus at all on religion as part of the socialization process. Several studies (Chaudhury and Miller 2008; Park and Ecklund 2007; etc.) only use exploratory methods vis-a-vis religion rather than sustained analysis. The dearth of studies especially pertains to Muslim religious socialization. Meanwhile, many of the general statements derived from the analyses about religious socialization do not address religious socialization and value transmission taking place within families (Guest 2009). Therefore, a detailed study of religious socialization that includes a range of relevant actors in the socialization process is needed to uncover its mechanisms.

Within the religious socialization literature, both non-Christian religions (when compared to Christianity), and immigrants (when compared to native populations) are underrepresented. Since the American religious landscape has become more diverse than ever before (Pew Research Center 2015), the connection of family and religion within Muslim immigrants is of paramount significance. Muslim immigrants, during religious socialization, not only transmit Islamic beliefs and values but also teach their children how to construct their Muslim identity in a predominantly Christian society.

Given that a Muslim identity is not simply an object or a torch that is passed on from parents to children, its dynamic nature where all actors interacting each other for its construction should be reflected in scholarship. For example, when a family gifts a prayer mat to their child, this is not only an act of gift-giving, but also combining the elements of embodiment (bodily movements on the prayer mat), materiality (the fabric or the cost of the prayer mat), aesthetics (the design and the artwork on the prayer mat), narrative (when the prayer is gifted as a result of a milestone event such as the daughter has started performing her prayers for the first time), and spirituality (what kind of

spiritual feeling the prayer mat brings up to the believer) in a dynamic way during the religious socialization process. As seen in the example, in line with Ammerman's (2020:21) recent call for research on "lived religion," this study also presents some of the active elements of such religious practice—such as "embodiment, materiality, emotion, aesthetics, moral judgment, narrative, and spirituality" (Ammerman 2020: 21).

Therefore, while quantitative studies can capture aspects of religious faith in various ways (e.g., measuring "religiosity"), it is especially key to have qualitative studies that observe this lived and everyday religion in dynamic action. In fact, ethnographic work that observes the give-and-take between parents, children, and school in detailed fashion offers a great way to understand the religious socialization process itself. This qualitative approach is not about detailing how many people are like those observed, but rather about detailing the lives-in-action of those observed. "When interpreting a study of, for example, 40 immigrant low-income women in San Diego, CA, researchers expect to learn something empirical about the conditions of low-income immigrants in other cities and regions, not merely about those 40 women," wrote Small (2009:10) in his article about the unique contribution of ethnographic work—which is not about creating pictures of "statistical representativeness" but about the detailed description that informs our theories and understandings. Similarly, when this dissertation study focuses on three weekend schools, for example, I have made sure that these suburban Muslim schools come from the same Sunni theological background, thereby facilitating comparisons between these schools located in the Southeastern US with similar schools elsewhere in the United States. Likewise, the monocultural weekend school that I study, which belongs to a faith-based social movement, uses the same resources and

curriculum in their monthly meetings attended by people from all over the United States and Canada—thereby facilitating comparison once again. In addition to such strategic choices, I have strived to bolster the validity of this study by applying multi-site data triangulation—doing so by focusing on weekend schools (the macro level), parents (the meso level), and a case study of a family (the micro level). As Flick (2004:178) notes, “Triangulation of data combines data drawn from different sources and at different times, in different places or from different people.” The evidence from these different groups and settings makes clear that, among other things, children are not passive in the religious socialization process; while they are not completely free to do as they choose, they still have some agency at their disposal—developing their own interpretations and beliefs amid their religious socialization.

This study also brings interesting dynamics to the primary versus secondary socialization discussion (Berger and Luckmann 1966). The primary socialization given by Muslim parents (bi-directionality) and the secondary socialization provided by weekend schools (channeling) bring interesting questions along with them. For example, some Muslim families start religious education of their child at a very early age. To what extent does religious knowledge become a part of primary socialization? Can we strictly classify weekend schools as the actors of secondary socialization or are they the extension of primary socialization? What is the difference between “belief in God” taught in the family and at the weekend school? Such crucial questions need to be addressed.

As mentioned during the bi-directionality discussion, children display agency during religious socialization. Classroom dynamics between teachers and students—such as that occurring during religious lessons, which can include power struggles (e.g.,

difference of opinions)—reveal this agency in intriguing fashion. If, as the recent scholarship claims, children have agency, how do they utilize, negotiate, and manifest it? A second-generation Muslim child who has gone through the American educational system and learned the basics of American culture would question some of the things they learned at weekend school if the latter are at odds with their frame of reference. In my study population, the majority of children did attend public school; one of the reasons parents have sent their children to a weekend school is to counter the effects of the public school. For all these reasons, studying the religious socialization process of Muslim immigrant children makes this research timely and needed in the American setting.

Finally, the combination of three things makes this project a unique one. First, in order to reveal the bi-directional nature of religious socialization, the interactions of children with their teachers in three different weekend school settings is observed. Chapter One deals with these observations. Observing students' reactions to the material in the form of comments or questions not only allowed me to see things through the eyes of a child, but it also gives us clues about the negotiation process between actors. The perception and the reaction of children, the contribution of various actors to the religious socialization process, as well as the negotiation among the actors amid this process, all required a qualitative study that allowed me to understand the meanings of the emotions and the experiences of the actors, particularly the children.

Second, instead of relying on large-scale surveys that have individuals respond to a fixed set of questions, I have explored the thought process of parents while they engage in the religious socialization of their children. Chapter Two lays out this thought process and parental practice through 27 interviews with 47 people. For example, what

kind of decisions did they make before providing religious education to their children? What are their main motivations when sending their children to a weekend or an Islamic school? How do they respond to difficult questions asked by children? etc.

Third, through an in-depth case study, I am able to delve deeply into the socialization process itself in one family. Research usually focuses on who plays the bigger role in religious socialization or transmission, or whether the individuals end up being religious or not; but *how* actors play their role and *how* the children internalize religious beliefs and values need explanation as well. Without finding out the intricacies of the process, it could be simplistic to interpret the outcome of that process based on surveys alone. Also, in-depth observation of a family would provide the best snapshot of bi-directionality in religious socialization. Chapter Three gives us a good example of this snapshot.

Together, these chapters provide a holistic picture of the religious socialization process with its major actors (parents, children, weekend school, peers, cultural products) in different settings (weekend schools, parents homes, and other social settings) and at different levels of analysis that range from the macro (weekend schools), and the meso level (families) to the micro (one family).

Methodology

This dissertation deals with religious socialization process through multi-site data triangulation that involves observation of three weekend schools (Chapter One), interviews with the parents of a weekend school (Chapter Two), and a case study of a family that is active in religious socialization (Chapter Three).

Chapter One focuses on the participant and non-participant observation of three suburban weekend schools. I chose the setting of weekend schools because Muslim immigrants extensively use weekend schools for the religious socialization of their children (Khan et al. 2016). In particular, Muslim immigrants living in the suburbs extensively utilize weekend schools for the religious socialization of their children (Howe 2018). While focusing on weekend schools serving middle class families, I nonetheless wanted to take into account other factors that differed among various schools. I thus decided to compare three such schools operating under Ahmad Islamic Masjid (AIM), Furqan Community Masjid (FCM), and Turkish Cultural Center (TCC)—so as to reveal how each Islamic weekend school shaped the socialization process. These three schools are operated under the administration of their respective mosques, but weekend school administrations might differ a bit from the mosque boards in that mosque boards might or might not have any representative at the weekend school. Sometimes a board member oversees the weekend school to report its activities to the board, whereas in some cases, the weekend school principal directly reports to the mosque board. In all three cases, the weekend school principal was not part of the mosque boards and only FCM had a liaison with the weekend school. At AIM and TCC, the principal would directly report to the board.

Before choosing these three schools, I did some research regarding eight schools in the area—detailing their theology, their popularity, their location, and their relationship with the wider community. From these eight weekend schools, I chose one progressive and one traditional weekend school. Thanks to my nationality and connections, I then chose the third one of the Turkish weekend school, which provided a

monocultural perspective. TCC, meanwhile, provided a healthy mixture of traditional and progressive approach.

Unfortunately, because of the COVID-19 pandemic, my data collection in these three sites was interrupted. I was able to collect data at AIM and FCM only for four months just before the COVID-19 began, which started roughly around February-March 2020. For several months, the schools could not recover from the initial shock. By the time they decided to continue their educational program via online platforms, the school year was already over. They did not do anything in summer. When the schools reopened in August 2020, FCM and TCC did so exclusively via online platforms, such as Zoom. AIM did not use any online platform, and it did not restart face-to-face classes until April 2022, which was already late for my data collection phase.

I continued my observations for FCM and TCC when they were teaching online. Once the restrictions for the pandemic were lifted, both FCM and TCC were reopened. However, due to pandemic-related measures taken at FCM, I was not allowed to make any observations in their classrooms, practically ending my study with FCC. Thus, I continued my in-class observations at TCC. The timeline of my observations with the weekend schools is summarized in Table 1.

[Table 1 About Here]

The three mosques associated with these weekend schools are each located in the northern suburbs of the city in which I conducted by research. FCM and AIM are multiethnic mosques, while TCC is monoethnic, composed of only Turkish Muslims. AIM and FCM's congregants are from Pakistan, India, Middle East, and North Africa. They also have some non-immigrant congregants. The socioeconomic status of the congregants should be similar to each other because the median household income for

the zip code in which FCM is located is \$109,786 and the median household income in AIM's zip code is \$107,423 (Census Bureau n.d.). In the United States, Muslims usually attend the closest mosque to their homes (Bagby et al 2001); therefore, we can expect comparably similar socioeconomic status in both mosques that are diverse in terms of ethnicity. The median household income for TCC's zip code is around \$80,000; thus, this also puts TCC congregants within the income range of the upper middle class.

Even though all three mosques are theologically mainstream Sunni mosques, they do not exactly belong to the same spot on the spectrum in terms of their daily application of theological and jurisprudential issues (see the comparison in Table 2). Despite the similarities in socioeconomic status of their respective congregations, the congregants can differ from each other in terms of the time spent in the United States. Some Muslim immigrants came just a few years ago, while some of them came more than two decades ago. Furthermore, some Muslim immigrants have already become citizens, some of them have Green Cards, or different visa types such as investor's visa, work visa, and student's visa; there are also asylum-seekers. These differences not only indicate varied immigration experiences, but we can also expect varied religious socialization trajectories for the children of these Muslim immigrants.

[Table 2 About Here]

There are some differences among the mosques themselves. AIM is a traditional, multiethnic mosque founded in 2005. I situate AIM on the "traditional" side because all board members of the mosque are male. Also, inside the main prayer hall, there was initially a big partition between men and women; later, women were excluded from the main hall, allocating the entire room to men. Finally, the mosque is not part of any interfaith or intercultural gathering.

FCM, in contrast, is a progressive, multicultural mosque within the mainstream Sunni tradition. I describe FCM as “progressive” for several reasons. First, it is more inclusive of women on its board than is AIM: five of the nine members of the Board of Trustees are female. Half of the executive committee members are also female. Second, women pray in the same main area with men without any partition. Third, FCM organizes mixed-gender programs for middle and high schoolers. Fourth, when the immigration ban on certain Muslim countries was first passed by the Trump administration, a group of American neighbors came to FCM and protested this decision. While this incident might not necessarily be the indication of progressiveness, it is indicative of the level of integration that FCM has achieved with its neighboring non-Muslim communities. Finally, FCM engages in interfaith dialogue activities—which includes organizing such programs and inviting private high school students to give lectures about Islam.

The third mosque, Turkish Cultural Center (TCC), is a mono-ethnic one attended predominantly by Turkish-Americans. Indeed, there are very few non-Turkish people attending the mosque. The Friday sermons at TCC are delivered in Turkish and English, but mostly in Turkish. Even when a bilingual sermon exists, the Turkish one lasts longer than the English one. In its neighborhood, TCC is known as the “Turkish Mosque.” The mosque is part of a cultural center that primarily serves the social, cultural, and religious needs of Turkish-Americans, although there are also some non-Turkish Muslims attending the mosque in very small numbers. The mosque is funded by the members and sympathizers of the Gülen Movement (GM), a faith-based transnational social movement rooted in Islam (Saleem and Osman 2019:62). The larger GM

community engages in educational activities, relief efforts, and interfaith dialogue events in the United States (Lacey 2014).

To observe the schools, my research assistants and I sat in on weekend school classes, at the back of the classrooms, and took notes. When I was not allowed to a classroom due to privacy issues, my female research assistants conducted the observation. In our observations, we focused on three things: teaching style, reaction of the children to the content, and the content itself. Teaching style is about how the teacher approaches the teaching and the learning processes. Because I observed the students at the elementary school level, I paid particular attention to the styles that teachers used for each age group. Did the teacher use the authority, the delegator, or the facilitator style? Did the students listen to the teachers without questioning what they said? Did the teacher ask questions to facilitate the discussion and help students find the answers to certain questions by themselves?

The second thing I dwelt on was student reactions. A student's posture, overall attention, mood, expressions, and emotions reveal many things about overall quality of the educational experience, as well as the overall interest level of the class. Do the students sometimes ask difficult questions to the teacher that will make them uncomfortable? Such questions reveal children's agency as much as the bi-directionality.

Finally, I took a close look at class content. How was God introduced at different age groups? What was the dominant emotion when talking about God? Which Islamic classes, topics, and sub-topics were given priority? For example, when talking about Prophet Muhammad, what part of his life was taught? Did they focus on his leadership, battles, family life, spirituality, or some other areas? This kind of focus allowed me to

compare the same classes in different mosques. For example, one of the classes is called Seerah, which is about the life of Prophet Muhammad. That class was taught at FCM and AIM. Thus, comparing the content of the same class in two different Sunday school settings revealed theology, worldview, teaching style, and several other possible differences.

In addition, I also analyzed the curricula and the syllabi of these programs along with the classroom materials including textbooks. As we already know, Muslim children's books are used as a powerful religious socialization tool. Weekend schools and parents use these books to transmit Islamic values to their children, but the differences across schools or households, such as those in theology or language, existed. I investigated how these books are utilized at home and at the weekend school. For example, children could be encouraged to read these books alone or parents could prefer to read by themselves. How did these books help shape the religious beliefs and values of children? The strategies parents and teachers as actors adopt through the use of children's books as a significant socialization tool is a proper indicator of the path for the religious socialization process.

In Chapter Two, I conducted interviews with parents of one weekend school I observed (TCC). When this research began, I was planning to conduct interviews with the parents of *all* three weekend schools featured in Chapter One. However, because of the COVID-19 pandemic, I could not continue my observations with AIM because they did not reopen their weekend school for in-person classes. FCM was able to re-start face-to-face education, but they did not allow visitors in their classrooms due to their pandemic-related measures. Therefore, I lost connection with the parents of these two weekend schools, leaving me with only one option: the parents of students who attended

the TCC's weekend school, who were also closely connected to the Gülen Movement. I was able to gain access to movement members through two informants, one of whom was a friend of mine.

I conducted interviews with 27 Turkish families, for a total of 47 people, that are either now sending their child(ren) to Turkish Cultural Center's (TCC) weekend school or that had sent them in the past. I used a combination of convenience and snowball sampling, with referrals and direct contact to recruit interviewees. During my weekend school observations, I met almost all of the parents of the school; hence, those I approached for interviews already knew about my project. My positive response rate was more than 60 percent. Although some families accepted being interviewed, due to their busy schedule and other obstacles such as observation of Ramadan, the interviews did not occur. Meanwhile, a few of those who accepted interviews recommended some other families. In four of the interviews, a spouse was not available, so these interviews were conducted with only one participant. There was also a divorcee who participated in the interview alone.

Interviews took place in a variety of places: respondents' homes, the researcher's home, coffee shops, respondents' businesses, and the Turkish Cultural Center. When respondents hosted me in their homes, they showed great hospitality and made sure I was physically comfortable before we began the interview; I was also offered food and drink. If the interview took place at the respondents' home, children usually did not share the same room with us. There were only two exceptions to this, and even then, children did not interfere with or interrupt the flow of the interview.

Interviews lasted from 45 minutes to three hours. Before the interviews, I handed out a demographic survey in Turkish or English. All respondents preferred to speak in

Turkish, their native tongue. In the interview, I asked respondents questions that covered their family and religious backgrounds; their connection with the Gülen Movement; their current family life; their journey to the United States; their provision of religious education to their children; and their views on certain issues. I also asked about their food choices, and their approach to morality. I recorded all the interviews, but I also took notes during the interviews. After each interview, I recorded audio summaries of important points that respondents mentioned. I then transcribed and translated the interviews, coded them according to various categories, and highlighted the recurring patterns.

All the parents I interviewed had connections with the Gülen Movement, but to different degrees. Although the Movement has no membership initiation or ritual that marks when a person “officially” joins, some respondents saw themselves as lifelong members while others spoke being only loosely affiliated with the Movement. As for how their connections to the movement began, some respondents were born into the Movement thanks to their own parents’ affiliation, while others joined the Movement on their own as high schoolers or adults. That being said, all the parents I interviewed had volunteered for the Movement for an extended period of time, at least for a year. Volunteering included, but was not limited to, tutoring younger students, providing spiritual guidance, organizing *sobhats* (religious conversations in Turkish), doing charitable works, etc.

All the interview respondents were born in Turkey, making them first-generation Turkish immigrants in the United States. Almost all of them, with a couple of exceptions, came to the United States after graduating from college in Turkey, while two women came to the United States upon marriage. While all respondents are first

generation immigrants, their times of arrival in the United States considerably differs. Based on large exodus from Turkey in the aftermath of the coup attempt in 2016, in which Gülen Movement followers were specifically targeted, we can divide the community into *oldcomers* and *newcomers*. The latter group mostly consists of those who arrived in 2016 and later, while the former group's arrival time ranges between late 1990s and 2015.

The themes and patterns emerged during the interviews will be discussed in the discussion section of chapter two. Using Geertz's thick description (1973), I will lay out as many details as possible about the respondents and their religious socialization efforts in the empirical section.

Chapter Three features an in-depth observations of a Muslim immigrant family so as to illuminate the intricate details of the religious socialization process. Such a study requires capturing many details in order to produce a thick description of the family by observing it inside and outside the home setting. The decision to do so was inspired by the methodological approach of Lareau (2002), who when observing parenting styles, "shadowed" some families over stretches of time—observing them in action within the home and far beyond it. This approach also allows me to get at the lived process of religious socialization. That is, I did not just interview families about it, but I actually observed a family in action for two years.

This study will also be one of its kind in several ways. First, to my knowledge, there is no study that focuses on the religious socialization of Muslim immigrants in the home setting. Second, although weekend school observations and interviews with the families in Chapters One and Two provide invaluable data for my research, the former is a snapshot of the religious socialization process for a limited time (four hours a week),

and the latter is based on the statements of the parents instead of direct observation. Besides, when conducting interviews with parents on certain topics, such as religiosity, the desirability effect might play into the responses (Latkin et al. 2016). In order to verify and double check the responses of the interview participants, a study that would observe the religious socialization process for an extended period of time had to be carried out. By observing the interactions of children with their parents, siblings, peers, relatives, and other actors, in different settings, for an extended period of time, I aimed to locate the religious socialization process in a larger and more consistent frame.

Due to privacy issues and opposite-sex dynamics in religious Muslim communities, it was next to impossible for me to conduct in-depth observation in the home setting. Also, I was particularly looking for a family who would be comfortable in navigating two “sensitive” or “controversial” issues about the religious socialization process. First, I needed a family who had been in the Gülen Movement for a long time. It is hard for someone to be knowledgeable about a semi-closed structure like GM without being a member of it for some time, yet that insularity might make them hesitant to speak of the experiences. Yet, I also chose a family whose relationship with the Movement was “loose.” This was more preferable to a group of individuals who were former and disgruntled members or who are current members keen on proselytizing. Second, I needed a family to tell me straightforwardly about the controversy around the Movement for the last decade. The Movement has always been controversial (Hendrick 2013), but after the coup attempt in 2016, it was also declared a terrorist organization by the Erdoğan government (Yavuz and Koç 2016). When people have strong opposite views about a faith-based social movement, the researcher looks for an objective as

possible viewpoint (e.g., informed but not swayed by emotion) that would summarize the controversy.

Due to the aforementioned family dynamics and the length of the work that needed to be done, families whose participation I asked for did not feel comfortable about the home observations. Some of them did not even accept being observed outside the home setting. Nevertheless, I was able to find a family who would agree with such in-depth observation. The Yilmaz family has been in the United States since 2006. They have been part of the Movement since the mid-1990s. Before coming here, the couple worked for Movement-affiliated educational institutions in Turkey for a couple of years. Originally an elementary school teacher, Maryam has never had a chance to continue her profession due to the language barrier and visa issues in the United States. Meanwhile, Murat followed a lengthy academic process to become an assistant professor in the US. The couple's children were born in the United States. Pelin, their daughter, was a rising fourth grade student and Selim, their son, was a rising seventh grade student when I was allowed to observe this family. Now, Pelin has completed elementary school, and Selim has graduated from middle school.

The Yilmaz family proved to be a very intriguing case study for my research thanks to their background, worldviews, and family structure. The family came with some advantages and disadvantages. First, Murat's involvement with academia might have been an advantage for the objective perspective I was seeking. As it turned out, Murat's in-depth analyses of the Movement provided me invaluable information in terms of understanding the intricacies of the Movement. Second, as a couple, they have been part of the Movement for more than two decades. Third, they were a social family, meaning they have been in interaction with many other Movement-affiliated families in

town and in other cities and states. Fourth, they were religious, but not at the extreme level. A more religious family would probably have given me more materials, but there was the pitfall of them being overly apologist. The Yilmaz family, in terms of their spirituality, is similar to an average family in the Movement. An average movement-affiliated family performs their daily prayer and fully fasts in Ramadan (Ergil 2012), something also practiced by The Yilmaz family. Finally, the fact that they had two school-age children—one middle-schooler boy and one elementary-schooler girl—was something I was looking for to look for the themes that were revealed during the interviews.

Yet, the Yilmaz family also presented some potential problems. First, no matter how representative they could be, they were just one family, something not ideal for an ethnographic study (Small 2009). I strived to overcome this problem by keeping my observations dense and in consistent for a long time. I observed the Yilmaz family for almost two years. On average, I observed the family between 15-20 hours every week, some weeks higher than that, and some weeks there was no observation. On some days, we spent the entire day (around 15-16 hours) together. As a result of two years of observation, I was able to spend more than 1500 hours with the family. I believe these 1500 hours provided me enough data to make some tentative generalizations about religious socialization process and the Gülen Movement itself.

Secondly, Murat was on average more educated than a typical Gülen Movement member, although out of 47 people I interviewed, 46 of them had a college diploma, along with some people with PhD degrees. Thus, his overqualification would present some challenges, albeit not in a dramatic way. Finally, there would be some issues regarding their criticism of the Movement. I would not be sure whether a specific

criticism was an objective one or it would stem from their personal issues with the Movement. In order to tackle this potential problem, I noted every criticism the family directed, did research on the Internet, and talked to other respondents and informants in the Movement to confirm the validity of the criticism.

The Yilmaz family had been to two different states before moving to the current one. Murat is a social scientist at a mid-size university. Maryam is a homemaker, but she is active in the community. She has been doing online business on a small scale for a little bit more than two years. She worked as a teacher, volunteer, and administrator for the weekend school at different times. During the two-year observation, I had a chance to interact with the entire family, including the children, although I preferred not to speak with the children when at least one of the parents was not around. Because my wife and also have two children of similar ages, there were opportunities to come together as a families, and we did it a couple of times, but in order not to complicate and confound the research, I mostly kept my own family away from the Yilmaz family.

The family allowed me to do inside-the-home observation, but the observations did not end there. When the family went outside, I tried to accompany them on as many trips as possible—including picnics, dining out, celebrations, ceremonies, family visits, shopping, sporting practices, entertainment venues, and prayer attendances. I spent a great deal of time with the family, hanging out with them at least a couple of times a week, each time from one hour to nine hours. When I was at their home, I was either alone with Murat or we were all together. Considering Islamic etiquette, I did not visit the family if Murat was not home. The only exception was the moments when Maryam invited her female friends to her home and she called me to engage in some observations. My observation with the Yilmaz family totaled more than a thousand

hours. I took notes in my journal or smartphone through notepad or voice recording. All quotations by Murat or Maryam were directly taken from these recordings. However, because we always interacted in Turkish, the quotations are my translations.

Researcher Positionality

I am well positioned to engage in this research thanks to my academic, religious, and ethnic background. Thanks to my academic background in Islamic Studies and Christian-Muslim Relations, I possess the skills to interpret both Islamic theology and how Muslim communities experience Islam. Also, I have previous ethnographic experience with a Latinx community who attend a Buddhist temple in Texas (Cherry et al. 2018), where I made observations and conducted around 30 interviews.

Muslim communities in the West are generally uneasy and reluctant about being studied, particularly if the researcher is non-Muslim (Hass 2021). Being a Muslim allowed me to enter the space where I conducted my observations and to build rapport with the weekend school communities. Sharing the same faith in a Muslim minority country builds trust between the researcher and the researched (Altorki and El-Solh 1988). Hence, during the pre-COVID-19 period, I was able to obtain necessary permissions from the respective boards of the weekend schools with no difficulty. Being a man also allowed me to join men-only events and meetings.

That said, being a man also brought some disadvantages into the field. Due to privacy issues and opposite sex dynamics in religious Muslim communities, it is usually discouraged for a man to be with a woman alone in a room, or vice versa. Hence, a small minority of female teachers did not want an adult male presence in their classroom. My female research assistants helped me with the classroom observations if such a case

occurred. I trained my research assistants on ethnographic observations, basic Islamic theology, and Islamic etiquette. One of my research assistants is Turkish, allowing me to receive her assistance at TCC's weekend school. The very same privacy issues also made it difficult for me to closely follow a family for the in-depth research portion of my study.

My Turkish nationality mostly facilitated the research, although it also caused brief complication in the beginning. The Gülen Movement has a semi-closed structure that makes initial entry very difficult unless you know someone from within (Hendrick 2013). An informant told me that if a non-Movement member of a Turkish nationality joins the circle, they treat the person with suspicion. Thanks to my personal connections with two GM members, I was introduced to the decision-makers, and they removed any doubts in the community about me. If nobody vouches for the researcher, it is an uphill battle to be accepted to their environment. My earlier familiarity with the Movement through the Turkish media outlets due to their power in their heyday provided the necessary background information about the Movement.

Before conducting interviews, I had an opportunity to get to know the Gülen Movement people better by joining their cultural and interfaith events. Speaking the same language and being familiar with their theology and culture allowed me to seamlessly join their events. I began their weekend school observations around the same time. That way, I was able to get an overall grasp of the Movement, including its overall organizational chart. In line with Brewer's (2001:13) argument, I strived to collect data in a way that a "[R]esearcher imposes a minimal amount of personal bias in the data." As required by ethnographic research (Lichterman 2017), I used reflexivity in order to eliminate bias and interpret the results in their own merit, rather than according to my

expectations. I also emphasized biographical interviews because they are powerful tools to reveal human agency based on the situations and contexts (Wengraf 2001).

Conclusion

This dissertation is an ethnographic study of the religious socialization process of second-generation Muslim immigrant children. Through the use of on-site observations of three weekend schools, semi-structured interviews with parents, and in-depth observation of a family in different settings, it will reveal important details of the religious socialization process—showing not only “lived religion” in Ammerman’s (2020) term, but also the lived process of religious socialization.

The dissertation proceeds in three chapters: “Traditional vs. Cool vs. Light Islam: A Comparison of Three Suburban Weekend School” (Chapter One), “The Making of a Muslim-Turkish-American: Religious Socialization in Gülen Movement Affiliated Turkish Families” (Chapter Two), and “Forgetting Istanbul in America: The Case of The Yilmaz Family” (Chapter Three).

Table 1: Timeline for Observations in All Three Weekend Schools

	<i>Fall 2019</i>	<i>Winter Retreat 2019</i>	<i>Spring 2020</i>	<i>Fall 2020</i>	<i>Spring 2021</i>	<i>Fall 2021</i>	<i>Winter Retreat 2021</i>	<i>Spring 2021</i>
WEEKEND SCHOOLS:								
AIM	Face-to-Face	N/A	Cut Short Due to COVID-19	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	Late Opening
FCM	Face-to-Face	N/A	Cut Short Due to COVID-19	Online	Online	Not Allowed Access	N/A	Not Allowed Access
TCC	Face-to-Face	Face-to-Face	Cut Short Due to COVID-19	Online	Online	Face-to-Face	Face-to-Face	Face-to-Face

Table 2: Comparison of All Three Schools in Terms of Their Daily Application of Theological and Jurisprudential Issues

MOSQUE NAME	THEOLOGY & DENOMINATION	DISCURSIVE THEME	ETHNICITY	PARTITION BETWEEN MEN & WOMEN	RELIGIOUS PROGRAMS
Furqan Community Masjid (FCM)	Progressive & Sunni	Abrahamic Americanism	Multiethnic	No	Sunday Weekend School Qur'an Memorization (Hifz) School
Ahmad Islamic Masjid (AIM)	Traditional & Sunni	Homeland Homesick	Multiethnic	When in place there was a solid partition. Later, women were sent to another room	Sunday Weekend School Qur'an Memorization (Hifz) School AIM Science Academy
Turkish Cultural Center (TCC)	Semi-Progressive & Sunni	Abrahamic Americanism & Homeland Homesick	Monoethnic (Mostly Turkish)	Yes, with some holes	Saturday Weekend School

CHAPTER ONE
TRADITIONAL VS. COOL VS. LIGHT ISLAM:
A COMPARISON OF THREE SUBURBAN WEEKEND SCHOOLS

Muslim Weekend Schools and Children's Agency

Fifty-eight percent of Muslim Americans were born outside the United States (first generation), and 18 percent of Muslim American were born to immigrant parents (second generation; PEW Research Center 2017b). Both facts together mean that three quarters of Muslim Americans are either immigrants or children of immigrants. Furthermore, almost one third of Muslim immigrants arrived in the United States after 2000 (PEW Research Center 2017b). This makes Islam, in addition to being the fastest growing religion in the United States (Bagby et al. 2001), a mostly immigrant religion in the American setting.

Several waves of Muslim immigration arrived in the United States from the late 1800s onward (Haddad et al. 2003). In terms of their religiosity, Muslim immigrants in the initial waves, which occurred around the 19th century, were mostly secular in orientation or less religious than others in their homelands (McCloud 2003); however, Muslim immigrants who arrived in the post-1965 period were now more religious than those in their homelands (Abusharaf 1998). Once the number of Muslims arriving in the United States grew larger, they started establishing their own mosques. In fact, the number of mosques in the United States almost doubled between 2000 (around 1,200) and 2010 (around 2,100; Grossman 2012). While the numbers might not have increased at the same rate since then, we can nonetheless predict that there likely are more than 3,000 mosques around the country. More than three quarters of these US mosques were

established after 1980, and the percentage of suburban mosques in the US rose from 16 percent in 2001 to 28 percent in 2011 (Bagby 2012).

According to scholars (Barzegar 2011; Maliepaard and Phalet 2012), Muslim immigrants in the United States exhibit a different residential pattern than those in Europe. Unlike their densely populated counterparts in Europe, Muslims are generally “spread out” in the United States. This residential pattern among Muslims in the American landscape (perhaps apart from a few states like Michigan, New York, and New Jersey) prevents them from creating large concentrations of residents in urban areas, as they do in Europe. This residential pattern described by scholars resonates with the weekend schools that I observed (in terms of where they and their student are located); all the families that I interviewed live across several suburbs located next to each other rather than within an “enclave” of sorts in which numerous fellow immigrants live closely together. However, based on my rapport with the weekend school parents and observations in several different cities with a sizeable Muslim population, we can, at least partially, talk about an enclave-like mindset for some Muslims, who prefer to live around the mosques they generally attend—preferring proximity to these institutions. Likewise, the Turkish parents I interviewed do not want to live far from the Turkish Cultural Center (TCC): most of them are concentrated within a 10-mile radius of the Center. This has caused the concentration of sorts among these Muslim immigrants, not within a dense enclave, but rather across three or four suburban areas with similar socioeconomic status. The situation should be more or less the same in cities with a similar Muslim population. That being said, although the mosque that operates under TCC is monocultural, almost 97 percent of the mosques in the United States are multicultural (Bagby 2012).

Immigrant worship places in the United States serve other purposes besides a primary focus on spirituality—purposes such as acting as cultural centers, providing social capital, and establishing economic opportunities (Portes and Rumbaut 2001). Another purpose of these worship places is to transfer religious and moral values to the next generation through weekend schools. In the city where I conducted my research, there are around 20 mosques within a 10-mile radius. More than half of them are running a weekend school. This obviously shows the proliferation of these schools as a result of demand. However, these schools, and others elsewhere, are not without some structural problems. According to a report by Islamic Society of North America (Khan et al. 2016: 2), “A strong disconnect exists between the teachers and students in weekend Islamic Schools due to a combination of factors, including a curriculum that does not relate to the students, outdated teaching strategies, and communication barriers between students and teachers.” The problems mentioned in this report also emerged in my research—particularly with regards to how they relate to their students, the children who are not merely passive receivers of lessons.

Children’s agency, as mentioned in the dissertation’s introduction, manifests itself in more than one way. Some children with a “sense of entitlement” might have the tendency to question things more than do children with a “sense of constraint” (Lareau 2002) who might prefer to accept the things as they are. Lareau tends to equate the sense of entitlement with children from middle class families and sense of constraint with children from working class families. Initially, I knew the children in my dissertation study are mostly coming from the same class background, but they were attending different weekend schools and their family background might have differed in

ways other than social class. Such variation could shape the nature of bi-directionality occurring in the religious socialization offered by these weekend schools.

Immigrant families, if they are working or middle class, usually turn to schools that focus on extracurricular activities (such as chess or music) and that offer resources (children's books) to help children get socialized, as well as possibly to experience upward mobility. Lu's (2013) study, for example, demonstrates how such not well-to-do immigrant families utilize local music schools so that their children could gain familiarity with high culture and, in the process, could help their children eventually enroll in prestigious colleges. Likewise, Muslim immigrant families extensively use children's books to socialize them into religious principles and gender roles (Budak 2019).

In light of such practices, we can utilize Bourdieusian scholarship in two ways. First, Bourdieu (1984) has argued that schools, by way of teachers and curriculum, favor certain children—those advantaged children who have inherited cultural capital from their families (such as a familiarity with high culture) that, in turn, allows them to have an advantage over their peers in terms of academic success and advancement. According to Bourdieu, particular knowledge valued by dominant groups in the broader society gets reinforced by teachers and lesson plans. By extension, children who have already made some progress in their initial religious socialization process at home might enhance their chances of adopting a Muslim identity that is in line with the dominant expectation of their community. Thus, in a similar vein, Muslim weekend schools could be the venues for the construction of religious identities, again in line with dominant expectations.

The second, and more important, application of Bourdieu is the creation of a moral habitus in children. Winchester's study (2008:1755) about Muslim converts reveals that daily prayers, fasting, and covering all produce moral dispositions such as humility, moderation, and modesty within the converts. Bourdieu's study (1977) about Algerian children's gender identity and how they learned and socialized into these identities is instructive for understanding how moral dispositions are created as a result of ritual-oriented behavior. Morality is not the end product for Bourdieu, who argued that people try to accumulate status, power and prestige through their activities and sometimes they use morals to do that (Lamont 1992); however, thanks to Bourdieu's theory of practical activity (Bourdieu 1990), we can interpret how religious practices that are "embodied" may allow believers to cultivate a distinctive moral dispositions—a way of situating and making sense of religious rituals.

Ammerman's (2020) emphasis on the elements of lived religions, such as embodiment, can be linked to Bourdieu's emphasis on the body. Bourdieu (1977:124) states, "The principle generating and unifying all practices is nothing other than the socially informed body." Thus, embodied religious practices help individuals form moral personalities. Mahmood's (2012) famous anthropological study on Muslim women, with slight variations from Bourdieu, confirms this premise.

Ahmad Islamic Masjid (AIM)

The first mosque, Ahmad Islamic Masjid (AIM), is located in one of the most elite suburbs in town, but unlike the other two mosques (FCM and TCC), AIM is located in a residential area. It has three different programs for their youth: Sunday school; *hifz* (Qur'an memorization) program; and AIM Science Academy, where it provides both

secular and religious education. AIM's Sunday school consists of character education, Qur'an practice, *Seerah* (the life of Prophet Muhammad), and Islamic history. There is not much information on their website except for some class names and their scheduling.

The one-story modular building used by the private school (AIM Science Academy) and Sunday school, does not catch anyone's eyes. There are seven classrooms and a cafeteria inside the building. The building is also a home to an Islamic school, AIM Science Academy, which seems to blend the natural and the Islamic sciences in the same curriculum. It runs like a public school. They teach Science and Math along with Qur'an, Hadith, and other Islamic classes. They also focus on what they call STEAM teaching in which their purpose is to incorporate STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Math) education. Because the Sunday school is using the same building, some classrooms are already full of daily class materials and small lockers are located in one corner for students who attend the Islamic school during the weekdays. Since I focus on the weekend school, I only observed the weekend school component.

The weekend school classes were merged by the age groups. For example, kindergarten and first graders shared a classroom, second and third graders another classroom, and fourth and fifth graders shared one as well. Then, middle school boys and girls each had one classroom, keeping sixth, seventh, and eighth graders all together. Students were usually from Pakistan, with some Middle Easterners and African Americans also among the student body. There was one Turkish student I found out after hearing his name. Another distinctive feature of AIM was the presence of middle school students at the weekend school. Their classes were gender segregated, as well.

Given that this weekend school had middle schoolers, I paid special attention to these classes. Sister Jamilah's class was one of those classes. There were on average six to seven female students present in her class. Half of these girls wore headscarves, the other half did not. Also, half of the girls were Black Muslims. They sat around a rectangular table. Whenever I entered the classroom, girls would change their postures, tuck their shirts in, and adopt a more serious look.

Sister Jamilah always wore a long robe, complementing her hijab. I had never seen her wearing pants. She is a middle-aged woman of Middle Eastern descent. She seems to be a pious person, with some grandeur that demands respect from the people around her. During the classes, she uttered plenty of Arabic words used in Islamic terminology along with Arabic words. Thus, she frequently switched between conversational vocabulary in English and technical vocabulary in Arabic, mostly the phrases including Qur'anic verses and *hadith*, the Prophetic tradition.

She had two classes: girls-only seventh and eighth graders and coed fifth and sixth graders. Although it was a *seerah* class, the prophetic biography, students did not necessarily always talk about Prophet Muhammad. When they did, Sister Jamilah would not follow a chronological method when talking about Prophet Muhammad's life. Instead, Sister Jamilah usually chose a topic and gave examples from the life of Prophet Muhammad. In addition, every week, she would talk about secondary topics. For example, in one class, she mentioned the importance of *dhikr*, remembrance of God. *Dhikr* is a kind of meditation in which certain phrases, such as names of God, are repeatedly chanted, mostly in certain numbers, to remember God (Esposito 2003). Talking about the spiritual benefits of *dhikr*, Sister Jamilah gave an example from her daily life. "Saying *dhikr* considerably decreased the number of tickets I got on the traffic

because it calms me down.” By connecting a spiritual concept with daily usage, she introduced the pragmatic side of doing *dhikr*. She also emphasized the chanting of the prayer and how it would be helpful for their daily activities and for the long term effects of being a good Muslim. For example, while making a tomato soup, she said she was aiming to repeat the chant *La ilaha illallah* (there is no god, but God) 800 times. Giving examples like this, she would teach students to make sure Islamic spirituality was part of their daily lives.

In another class, she talked about interpreting dreams. When a student asked about experiencing sleep paralysis, Sister Jamilah said it meant a *jinn* (Islamic word for genie or demon) was trying to take over. “It is a terrifying experience, but the solution is easy. You need to read the Qur’an; you should continue to chant your *dhikr*. Reciting certain verses from the Qur’an, like the last two chapters, is also effective. Also remember to do *istighfar*.” The last thing she recommended was repentance of sins. In addition to such spiritual advice, she concluded with a medical one. “If the problem persists, it might be sleep apnea and you should see a doctor.” It was interesting that Sister Jamilah was turning to spiritual solutions for one-time issues, but she opted for a medical solution for a recurring problem. This again showed her pragmatic approach to seemingly insoluble problems.

She also made students write down certain prayers or supplications. She would recite the supplication in Arabic but then provide the English translation. Then, to help students with the memorization, they repeated the supplication several times. In almost every class, they would dedicate some time to the memorization of these prayers, some of which were from the Qur’an.

Students usually listened to their teacher attentively. They rarely asked questions, but Sister Jamilah once in a while asked quick questions to make a point or to make sure they understood. She seemed knowledgeable about her topic. Despite her accent, she was very fluent in English, almost never stopping once she started speaking. Even when it was break time, she would not stop for a couple of extra minutes.

One day, Sister Jamilah revealed in the class that she did not send her children to the Islamic school in the same building. She preferred the private school in town owned by the Gülen Movement because she liked the education better over there, although that school did not have anything Islamic in their curriculum. When she talked about that school, she would say “Turkish school” instead of saying the school’s name. This was another example of how, in her daily life, she would occasionally approach certain things from a pragmatist perspective instead of an idealist one.

She sometimes would make connections between religion and society. “There are rights of Allah on us such as daily prayers, fasting, etc. but there are also rights of some people on you. For example, your neighbors have a right on you. You need to take good care of them should they ever need you. Remember Rasulullah’s hadith? He is not a believer who goes to bed with a full stomach, while his neighbor is hungry.” Through daily rituals and engaging in charitable works, Sister Jamilah tried to create a moral habitus within her students to be “good Muslims” (Winchester 2008). Yet, it should be noted that most of the emphasis on being a good Muslim revolved around daily supplications, prayers, and rituals.

Dawah was another important item on the agenda of AIM’s weekend school. The term means the invitation of non-Muslims to Islam. Sister Jamilah seemed to be dedicated to her *dawah*; therefore, she strove to raise *dawah*-minded Muslims. She

once talked about the importance of showing kindness to non-Muslim teachers so that their hearts could be warmed towards Islam. “You should not miss any itsy bitsy opportunity of random act of kindness because you never know if their hearts will be guided to Islam or not.” As it is salient in this example, the instructor taught how they could spread Islam or at least a good representative of Islam in their respective communities.

In her coed class with fifth and sixth graders, boys sat with boys, girls with girls together. This class also had six to seven students on average. Sister Jamilah picked a main topic every week, but she actually jumped from one topic to another most of the time, similar to her middle school classes. She did not have any difficulty talking about hot button issues like hell, terrorism, and the devil. She once argued for the necessity of hell to punish the unbelievers and sinners. She also stated that *Shaitan*, Arabic word for Satan, deceives humans and causes them to commit sinful acts.

Sister Jamilah talked like an apologist for most of her classes. She once referred to Muslim terrorists as “extreme people who wrongly interpreted the Qur’an.” She categorically rejected the acts of the terrorist, but at the same time she shied away from using the word “terrorist”—although that does not mean she would support these violent acts. Another example of the apologetic approach was to paint a dark picture of pre-Islamic Arabia, called *Jahiliyya* by Muslims—literally meaning “the age of ignorance.” Like many traditional Muslims do, in order to create a full contrast with the arrival of Islam, she described this period to students in a gloomy way. The concept of *Jahiliyya* was revived in the 20th century by some militant Islamic movements to describe modernity and Western civilization (Sivan 1990). Sister Jamilah made similar analogies in her classes, but in a more subtle way, without directly attacking the fundamental

values of Western civilization. She also used several examples from American society to buttress her arguments.

Another apologetic argument she offered in her classes addressed women's rights in Islam. Sister Jamilah repeated what most modern-day Muslims argue: claiming that Islam gave enough rights to women, but Muslims either are not aware of this or some Muslims oppressed women because of patriarchy. She also explained Prophet Muhammad's polygamy as the common practice in that time, although Muslim scholars provide alternative explanations to Prophet Muhammad's practice of polygamy (Rodgers-Miller 2004). Likewise, she explained *hijab* as something not linked to do oppression, and she gave an example of the Virgin Mary as someone who is described with a head covering in paintings.

Different from other apologists, Sister Jamilah also gave examples from the suffrage movement in the United States. She wanted to make sure her examples were relatable to her American-born students. For example, the events in one storybook she read were taking place in Kentucky. In another class, when talking about Paradise, she compared it to an air-conditioned lounge for business class passengers. But she also read stories that denigrated modernity or Western culture. In one story, several elements of pop culture—including movies, shopping, and the entertainment industry—were listed along with corrupt politicians and governments. Interestingly, it drew my attention that students, on that day, were mostly wearing the elements of this culture. One student's backpack was Minecraft-themed. A female student was wearing Converse sneakers. Several students were wearing hoodies. A male student was wearing a t-shirt with a dunking basketball player image on it. Thus, it would be interesting to learn what

they would think about the fact that their teacher was not saying nice things about the culture they grew up around.

Sister Jamilah would generally speak with certainty on some topics. For example, although most theologians argue that Kaaba, the holiest structure in Islam, was built by Abraham and his son Ishmael (Esposito 2003), she said it was built by Adam, the first human. There are a few exegeses that claim Sister Jamilah's argument, but they are far from attaining widespread acceptance. By attributing Kaaba's construction to first human, something I have also heard from one or two other respondents during the interviews, she linked Islam to the beginning of history. She also told students how more than 300 idols were placed inside the Kaaba in pre-Islamic period. She tied it to superstitions and some folk practices like good luck charms rather than people's beliefs.

While students generally seemed to listen attentively, they rarely asked any questions even for clarification purposes. They never asked her a difficult or provocative question that would spark some discussion or debate in the classroom. A couple of them would usually yawn toward the end of the class, but they had to be attentive due to the small class size. If someone's attention declined, she would revive that student's attention. In general, thanks to her fluency, enthusiasm, along with the small class size, she easily managed her classes. Also, doing the lecture around a rectangle table allowed everybody, including the instructor, to be on the same physical level, negating hierarchy. She also provided plenty of positive reinforcements, using Islamic phrases such as *Mashallah*—literally meaning “What God has willed,” which is used to express a feeling of appreciation or awe—or *Bareqallah*, blessings of Allah be upon you. All teachers at AIM generously use this Islamic vocabulary to establish a Muslim identity.

Sister Jamilah generally repeated the sexist language in some of the storybooks and textbooks she used for class. For instance, when she read a book about the last day, she used the phrase “last man on Earth.” Also, one day she was reading a storybook about the two angels who are assigned to every human to record their deeds in their life. In the story, the angel on the right side was called Saleeh, a male name. While the Qur’an rejects the notion that angels are the daughters of God (43:19), there is no proof that they are male, either. But the book Jamilah read was about a male angel as the main character of the story. The instructor did not make any explanation on this issue, neither did any student make any comment on the language.

Observing Sister Jamilah did not give me plenty of time to observe Brother Haleem due to schedule conflict, but I attended a few classes he taught. Haleem was considerably younger than Sister Jamilah, looking like a college student. He generally wore sweatpants and a t-shirt. He had some beard although it was not fully grown yet, probably because of his youth.

He used to teach the same *Seerah* class as Sister Jamilah, but his teaching style was more like a lecture because he was following a certain textbook, which was also followed by the students. In the classes at which I was present, they talked about the battles during the time of Prophet Muhammad. They followed a chronological order of the battles. He was very enthusiastic when talking about his material. He had some notes written on the edges of the textbook, and sometimes he was reading his notes. He did not switch to Arabic as much as Sister Jamilah did, but he still used certain Islamic phrases. He sometimes snapped his fingers to get the students’ attention during certain moments. Students were usually attentive, and they were racing with each other to answer some of the questions Brother Haleem asked. Yet again, similar to Sister

Jamilah's classes, they did not ask difficult questions of him. Thanks to some curious students, a few of them asked some easy questions, but in general they seemed to accept what he said and taught.

When Haleem completed the biography of prophet Muhammad, he continued with the prophet's successors. He spent some extra time with Umar, the second caliph after the passing of Prophet Muhammad. He used another textbook, titled *Umar ibn al-Khattab*, to summarize his points. He described Umar as strong, tall, and a warrior. It is interesting that Umar was also famous for his sense of justice, but Haleem did not mention it until later, preferring Umar's physical qualities over his character. He also said the Islamic community respected Umar, but he did not specify whether this respect was out of fear or admiration. Once in a while, when Haleem asked some historical trivia, students could not answer most of these questions. There was another noteworthy incident in that class. When Haleem asked about the caliphs, students only named four of them—Abu Bakr, Umar, Uthman, and Ali, known as *al-Khulafa al-Rashidun*, or Rightly-Guided Caliphs. These four caliphs have a special place within the Sunni view of Islam (Melchert 2019). It was also interesting that when he asked about the English translation of the term, *al-Khulafa al-Rashidun*, students responded as “four caliphs” instead of “Rightly-Guided Caliphs.”

In some classes, Haleem dedicated the last 15-20 minutes of his class to the memorization of one of the short Qur'an chapters. Somebody asked a question about the Qur'an that I could not clearly hear at the back, but the question must have been about the originality of the Qur'an. He started his response by talking about the Old and the New Testament. “What did Christians do? They changed the Bible. They changed the Old Testament,” he commented. Although it was not obvious whether he referred to

Christians or the Jews who changed the Old Testament, he uttered this oft-repeated sentence among lay Muslims. He concluded his arguments by saying, “If you try to read the Qur'an even if you don't understand, Allah will reward you.” The very same sentence was uttered by Sister Jamilah in another class. This kind of encouragement emphasizes the importance of doing the ritual instead of spiritually feeling and understanding it. Haleem then recited Chapter Tin and students repeated. Then children recited individually. They all had different levels of fluency and pronunciation. Some could not recite at all, while others did it by heart. No English translation was given by the instructor.

Elementary school students at AIM are taught by female teachers, all of whom are Middle Eastern. Despite the accent, their English is fluent. One of those teachers is Sister Layla. Having arrived in the United States in the early 2000s, she is from Syria. She works for the Islamic school during the weekdays, so the classroom she uses for the weekend school is the same homeroom in which she teaches for the Islamic school. She teaches a merged class of third and fourth graders. On average she teaches 12-14 students every week. The class is coed and the gender distribution is half and half. Yet, boys sit with boys and girls sit with girls. Sister Layla teaches Arabic and basics of Islam.

In the Qur'an class, Sister Layla helps children memorize short chapters. She does in a couple of ways. First, they recite a chapter verse by verse. Girls seem to repeat more than boys. Then, Layla explains the chapter, and she sometimes does so word by word. She asks quick questions, expecting one-word or short answers. In some cases, she even helps memorization through some visual aids. For example, she prepared a three dimensional landscape of the events that took place in Chapter Elephant, which talks about an army of the elephant with an allusion to the Abyssinian military

campaign toward Mecca. In the Qur'an, which is Chapter 105, the incident is narrated as God's punishment against this army that intended to destroy the Kaaba, the holiest place for Muslims. The chapter talks about some birds that threw small rocks to kill the soldiers of this army. Sister Layla's landscape featured an animal, some birds, soldiers, and Kaaba. With every verse she recited, she pointed out one element of the incident. This show-and-tell type of class helped students learn within a context and with English translation and commentary. In other classes, she did not have a similar detailed landscape, but she tried to explain every verse in its own context.

While Sister Layla emphasized the importance of being proud of one's Muslim identity, she also seemed to be more tolerant towards other religions than the other teachers I observed. When explaining the last verse of Chapter 109, (For you is your religion, and for me is my religion), she said, "You need to respect one's own religion. You can't say, he is Christian or Jewish, so I cannot talk to him." In another instance, when she advised them about their identity, she brought up the same tolerance issue. "Be proud of your identity. But show respect to other people with different religions." Similar to Sister Jamilah, she sometimes gave practical advice to children. For example, Muslim families usually allow only half a day fasting for children of elementary school age. So, Layla gave them some tips on how they would be able to get through the fasting at school by practicing a half-day fast.

Sister Layla also taught Arabic for the K-5th group. Because they do not have many students in this age range, they mostly merge the classes. In her first and second grade class, everyone would sit on the floor. She taught the most basic things for this age group, such as being able to read and write Arabic letters. Everyone would take turns and write a letter on the board. Layla used kid-friendly teaching methods. For example,

she would call stand-alone letters “mean” or “selfish” letters. If a student wrote the letter properly, she would high-five them. Not all students were fully familiar with the Arabic letters. Their level dramatically differed, ranging from no knowledge to full familiarity. For those with no familiarity, even writing a single letter can be a challenge as Arabic letters are written from right to left. The teacher would usually finish the class with some Play-Doh activity in which students make two-lettered words with the dough. Beginner Arabic classes have almost no religious references or examples. In upper grades, students learned a little bit of Qur’anic Arabic. In kindergarten classes, writing activity was replaced with coloring. They followed a textbook entirely composed of color-the-letter activities.

Sister Marwa taught basics of faith and *Seerah* class for the elementary school children. She did not work full time with AIM, leaving there after a couple of months. She taught Qur’an memorization, history, and pillars of the faith. Marwa was a young college student with some make-up and polished nails, a rarity in Muslim weekend schools. She did what Brother Haleem did on a lighter scale. For example, when she taught the life of the Prophet or the caliphs, she skipped the details. One day, while she was summarizing the conversion story of Umar, she left out several important details. On another day, when she asked about the number of caliphs and students said “four,” that was accepted by her. Here again, we see that the teachers remove the controversial parts of history from their curriculum. In terms of the four caliphs, only Abu Bakr and Umar’s caliphate are detailed. While Uthman and Ali were lauded as great Muslims, their caliphate was never mentioned at AIM.

Marwa’s teaching style was a mixture of discipline and chaos. She made sure that students learned every historical person and concept. She also had to hush students

when she was about to ask a question. But in terms of summarizing the material, she was arbitrary, having no consistency in what to include and what to leave out when she narrated several events. But thanks to her youth, she was generally loved by the students, despite some disciplining that she offered. Once, when she left the classroom to pick up something from another room, one student said, “She is my favorite teacher,” and another one said, “Mine, too.”

Students at AIM showed their American culture tendencies through their outfits as well as their language. In the cafeteria, during lunch break, teachers would speak Arabic with each other, while students exclusively preferred English, although some of them could speak Arabic. Their clothing, backpacks, and sneakers all bore the traces of American culture. One day, in one of the elementary school classes, the teacher was out for a couple of minutes and the students immediately gave a voice command to Alexa, saying, “Hey Alexa, play the song *Baby Shark*.” When the song started, the entire class formed a chorus. Children did not miss an opportunity to listen to a popular children’s song.

In general, AIM provides an idealized version of Islam at their weekend school. Controversial issues are interpreted in an apologetic manner with no criticism for Muslim communities or governments. Likewise, controversial parts of Islamic history are mostly skipped. If there was a question, which was rare, those questions were mostly answered through this idealized perspective. For example, they never taught the Umayyad or Abbasid caliphs who came after the first four caliphs. The subsequent caliphs comprised almost 95 percent of the Islamic history because Prophet Muhammad’s prophethood and the reign of four caliphs lasted only 50 years within the entire Islamic history that spans more than 1400 years ago. Almost all of the “feel-good”

spiritual stories were taken from Prophet Muhammad's time or from the period of the first four caliphs. Actually, even some of the stories about these four caliphs were taken from the pre-caliphate period when they were together with Prophet Muhammad, instead of the period after they became caliph. Likewise, teachers provided no contemporary examples regarding the religious or moral issues. Their only contemporary examples came from their daily lives if they were talking about an issue that modern-day Muslims might face.

Teachers at AIM were fluent in English and Arabic. Most of them were native speakers of Arabic and fluent speakers of English. Thus, they were able to switch between the languages easily, although not all students were able to comprehend the Arabic they spoke. AIM aimed to raise Muslim children who are proud of their Muslim identity. In terms of their approach to non-Muslims, the teachers had a mixed approach. They respected the identity of non-Muslims but not so much their theologies. Despite their obvious lack of knowledge about the Old and New Testament, they spoke with certainty, teaching children about the so-called corrupt nature of these holy books.

Moral issues were taught in connection with the Islamic rituals and spirituality. At AIM, being a good person is only possible by being a good Muslim, trying to create a moral habitus through rituals. Thus, Muslim identity comes ahead of the universal ethical principles which can only make someone better if that person is already a practicing Muslim. In their curriculum, AIM did not put good character traits as the main topic in any week. They are rather integrated into the overall Islamic curriculum. Unlike my expectations, children did not have much of agency at AIM, at least during structured class time. They carefully listened to the classes, asked casual questions, but they rarely asked difficult ones. They also never shaped future classes through their

input or feedback. The bi-directionality of the socialization process was seriously lacking at AIM—although their agency was on display when not under the supervision of teachers, such as singing *Baby Shark* all together when the teacher was not in the classroom.

Furqan Community Mosque (FCM)

Furqan Community Mosque (FCM) is located in another prominent suburb in the city. Unlike AIM, it is in the heart of a bustling business area. It is a very popular mosque in the area thanks to its community outreach efforts. It has a relatively progressive theology within the mainstream Sunni tradition. FCM is a multi-ethnic mosque whose congregation is notably diverse, reflecting the overall trend in the United States in which 93 percent of mosques are multi-ethnic (Bagby et al. 2001). The FCM congregation consists of Muslims from different nationalities. Also, the general perception within the city’s Muslim community about FCM is that their immigrant congregation is more “settled” compared to the other mosques, which means that the immigrants attending this mosque arrived in the United States earlier than did immigrants attending the other mosques. There are even third-generation Muslim immigrants attending the mosque along with some American converts. Actually, one board of trustee member is an American convert.

FCM has a wide variety of programs as part of its youth educational activities geared towards the elementary school children—such as a Qur’anic sciences program, an Islamic studies program, and a Qur’an memorization program. It also has programs for middle and high schoolers. Open to students from kindergarten to middle school

students, the Islamic studies program seems to be designed to help students “live and love Islam.”

The mosque adopts a module-based curriculum, and their website features a snapshot of this curriculum. According to that website, the classes are gender-segregated, and they divide K-8 students into four age groups: K-1st, 2nd-3rd, 4th-5th, and middle school. Classes are offered on Sunday mornings. The Qur’anic sciences program features such classes as stories of the prophets, ritual prayers, good manners, nature in the Qur’an, etc. There are some textbooks associated with grade-specific classes. Some of these textbooks are related to character education, while some of them are children’s books with stories, and one set of books are non-fiction. The language of instruction is English. The Qur’anic sciences program is also designed for elementary and middle school students with a focus on the Qur’an and Arabic. Instead of dividing the students according to grade levels, they organize around students’ reading and writing skills of Arabic. They offer this program on weekdays and over the weekend.

Finally, the *hifz* or Qur’an memorization program is designed for students to memorize the entire Qur’an. This program has its own specific website with some detailed information. Classes start early in the morning and end in the early afternoon. Students attend this program every day except for weekends, and they continue their secular education in the afternoons usually in the form of homeschooling. Again, for the purposes of this dissertation research, I only observed the Sunday school.

Their weekend school, before the pandemic, was very popular. The classes, especially K-3rd grades, were so crowded that some grades were having their classes in the main prayer hall of the mosque. Crowded classes were taught by two or three teachers. One teacher was leading, the class and her two assistants were helping her

maintain the order in the class. Unfortunately, I was not allowed to observe some of the female teachers' classes because some teachers did not want my presence in those classes, most probably due to privacy issues. In some classes, female teachers were reciting the Qur'an in a loud and musical tone. The female voice is not always encouraged to be heard by males in some Islamic circles (Lovat et al. 2013). Thus, for such classes, my research assistant helped me with the observation.

I started with the most crowded class composed of pre-K and kindergarten students. There were around 30 students in the main prayer hall. Sister Mina, a college student, was being helped by two female assistants who also looked like college students. Two-thirds of the students were girls. Everyone was sitting on the floor. The class was taking place in the men's section, but there was no separation from the female section.

Teachers uttered some of the common nursery school phrases like "criss-cross applesauce, hands in your lap" to get the attention of the children. Mina taught the most basic Islamic knowledge in a question and answer format. "How do you say the *Shahada*?" Without waiting for the answer, she answered herself to make sure everyone learned it first properly. *Shahada* is the first pillar of Islam, and it is the profession of faith. When someone, for example, decides to convert to Islam, they ask them to say the *shahada*. However, Mina did not provide the most proper translation when she said its meaning in English. The standard translation is "There is no god but Allah, and Muhammad is his messenger," but her translation was "There is no god, but Allah and Prophet Muhammed is the last prophet." Although all Muslims believe and accept that Prophet Muhammad was the last prophet, there is no "last" in *Shahadah*. This might have been a simple translation error, or it might have been a conscious choice.

The class lasted a couple of hours with the same teachers, along with regular breaks and the lunch break. In subsequent classes, Mina taught the remaining four pillars with some games and in-class activities. She gave privileges to those students who offered the correct answer when she posed a question. The privilege was to have a cushion. Students raced enthusiastically to have a cushion. Sometimes, students were told to sit in a circle and Mina and her assistants joined them. When students looked mentally tired, they played various games.

In subsequent weeks, they continued with the pillars of faith after completing the pillars of Islam. Students again got a cushion when they gave the correct answer to a question like “Who is the last prophet?” But something intriguing took place during this topic. When Mina asked, “What do we say when we say the name of the Prophet?” “Sallallahu alayhi wa sallam,” children shouted. This phrase can be translated as “May Allah honor him and grant him peace.” Mina asked a follow up question. “How do we show respect to Prophet Muhammad?” One child raised her hand and said, “Be kind to other people.” This answer was not the one Mina was expecting. So, she clarified herself by elaborating the question. “There is a bigger thing.” So, she was actually expecting to hear the aforementioned Arabic phrase. This conversation was interesting in that children’s interpretation of a question about respect fell on the practical and ethical side, while Mina preferred a ritualistic approach.

On the week, when they talked about the Kaaba, the holiest place, she detailed the story of Abraham intending to sacrifice his son Ishmael before he was given a ram by God. Unlike the common version which tells that the ram came from the heavens, she did not specify how the ram was given. Therefore, students did not ask her to specify how the ram was given to Abraham. Later on, as a follow-up activity, they built mini

Kaabas in groups composed of five children and one teacher. They used a chips box as the base. Then they stuck black cardboards, and finally four yellow stripes to complete their mini Kaabas. At the end of the competition almost everyone was awarded Smarties. One student said, "I cannot eat gelatin." The teachers said, "Don't worry. There is no gelatin in these candies."

These hands-on activities were not peculiar to lower level students. Even fourth and fifth graders engaged in such activities with more sophisticated projects. One Sunday, they were instructed to make their own masjid. They were able to work in pairs or individually. If they paired up, it was with someone of the same gender. The kids were given tape, colored pencils, construction paper, crayons, scissors, and whatever else they needed. They were all very good about sharing the supplies, and many of them decided to make 3D projects. They mostly had similar structures such as domes and minarets. The girls were more likely to include men and women sections. Teachers wanted the kids to know that masjids can look super adorned or very simple, but they all are meant to praise Allah. The teacher was able to maintain control over the class by being very encouraging with a good sense of humor.

Sister Mina had a unique way of connecting morality and spirituality. She points to the presence of God to prevent immoral behaviors. For example, during an in-class game, to enforce a fair game, she said, "Allah is watching you. He sees if you are peeking or cheating." She also tried to teach them to establish empathy by asking "How do you think I feel when you talk?" "Sad" was the response she wanted to hear.

For some classes, they merged two grade levels, just like they did for third and fourth graders. The resulting crowd turned out to be more than 40 students. Brother Mahmood, a junior at the local college, led the class, but he was helped by four

assistants. Two of them were walking around the student circle, one of them was helping those who had to go to the restroom, and one of them was holding a candy box to reward certain students. The assistant teachers were all female. In one week, Mahmood talked about the virtues of *wudu*, ritual ablution or cleansing, and the daily prayer.

He emphasized the community/ummah concept in order to give them a sense of community identity. Also, he said wudu washes away the sins, pointing out to the spiritual aspect of it. He then moved on to the prayer and explained why performing it in a masjid is rewarding socially and spiritually. “You guys will get 27 times more hasanah (spiritual reward) if you do it with a congregation. Also, establishing a masjid is to establish a community and environment,” he added. Again, the community building through spirituality is emphasized. “When you always do it together, you will get the shade of Allah in the Hereafter.” Mahmood, with these statements, encouraged all types of socialization, regular and religious, to build their Muslim identities and communities. He related his ideas to modern contexts. At the same time, being part of a community will help them reach salvation. Mahmood listed all the virtues of going to masjid, making dhikr, reciting the Qur’an. Interestingly, similar to other teachers at AIM, Mahmood stated that having difficulty or struggling to read the Qur’an will earn the reciter more spiritual reward. This was similar to the previous statements which argued the importance of reading even without much understanding.

Mina was sometimes challenged by children. In one class, she asked a question. “Who loves you more than your parents?” Children gave the expected answer: “Allah.” She asked again, “How do we know?” One of them said, “He created me,” and another added, “He gave me a nose.” She nodded her head confirming these answers and added her own answers. But then, a student raised his hand and stated, “Some people are poor.

Some people don't have legs." Mina said "Allah loves you and tests you. Allah is Al-Wadud, the loving one."

Brother Mahmood usually wore a traditional Pakistani outfit, whereas the children were all in modern outfits. He has a good sense of humor. When he was teaching them how to perform the ritual ablution, he made several jokes during the demonstration. He also made points about the importance of praying to God. "When you are ready to see Obama, do you go see him with the buggers in your nose?" Rather than using a recent unpopular president, he used a popular past president as an example, hoping that his example would be loved more. When a student mentioned the name of Donald Trump, several students reacted in disgust.

Mahmood, however, was not tolerant of any type of insensitive, even childish, jokes. For example, he once said, "I went to a private school," and a student responded with "Private schools are for dopes." That angered Mahmood, who ordered the child to step out of the classroom. Likewise, during a free-time game activity, when a student whispered her guess for the hangman game in the ear of the teacher, one student said, "She kissed him in the ear," and he was out.

Mahmood's classes were not devoid of students' difficult questions. One day, Mahmood was talking about the female companions of Prophet Muhammad. But interestingly, he was mentioning either the wives or daughters of the Prophet. In other classes, dozens of male companions were mentioned, but there was no mention of the wives or daughters, or any other female relatives of the male companions. Some of their names are known although they are not as popular as males. Also, while Mahmood was talking about the women companions, he suddenly jumped into the battles of the Prophet and started praising a male companion's bravery in the battlefield. Suddenly, a

female student asked, “What did women do in the battles?” “They helped the wounded soldiers,” he replied. “Looks like they were left out,” she responded again. “Women are equal to men.” “If we are equal, why didn’t they fight?” “It was more important for the women to survive because it was a nomadic culture.” The female student did not look satisfied by Mahmood’s responses.

One way to build a Muslim identity by FCM teachers was to teach children the Islamic vocabulary. They taught children what to say in various daily life situations, including when someone sneezes, sees something beautiful, wants to do something in the future, etc. These filler words would identify someone as Muslim, functioning like code words in identity construction.

In general, children showed more agency in the classroom than the ones at AIM. I identified two possible reasons for that. First, they might have been raised in more progressive and liberal families. Since there are some American-born Muslims among the founders of FCM, it is possible that some parents in similar condition might have decided to send their children to FCM. During the first months of my study, I came across a gentleman at FCM. I had met him earlier on another occasion; so, I roughly knew where he was living. To confirm, I asked whether his home was close to AIM. “Yes, actually AIM is almost next door, but I sent my daughters to FCM in the past and we were happy about it. Now, my son is here. I think this place is a better one for our family’s worldview,” he said. That gentleman was born in the United States, and he decided to send his children to a place where they could mingle with like-minded families’ children.

The second reason was the encouragement by the teachers. When they wrapped up a topic, they would make sure to ask, “Any questions?” At AIM, teachers would also

ask this sort of question, but they would also ask, “Is it clear?” or something along this line. Several times, they waited for an extra couple of seconds to take any questions, something that did not occur at AIM.

To illustrate the students’ agency, we can take a look at an example from Islamic history class. When some of the historical details did not make sense, they asked for explanation or clarification. When Mahmood was telling the story of Prophet Muhammad’s emigration from Mecca to Medina, he mentioned how some people waited for him on top of the trees for three straight days. “For three days in the desert?” This question baffled the teacher as he did not expect the question. “No, they must have done it occasionally or taken turns.” Unexpected questions would sometimes arise about the topics or incidents teachers usually took into granted. For example, one day Mina was telling the story of Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham). When she came to the part where Ibrahim left Hagar in the middle of the desert, Hagar asked where he was going and Ibrahim did not respond. A girl suddenly asked, “Why?” Mina couldn’t say anything for a couple of seconds, then she added, “We don’t know,” and she quickly continued to tell the story. Likewise, a student asked a teacher, “Where did their bodies go after the flood?” when the topic was Prophet Noah and the Ark. Sometimes, children just needed a definition as in the example of a student who asked, “What is pure?” when Mina said, “Allah is pure.” She had a hard time conveying its meaning, trying to find some words closer in meaning.

The children’s agency was on full display when they were able to detect a teacher that was unprepared. One day, there was a substitute teacher, a college aged woman, for the 2nd and 3rd grade class. The coordinator of the program was also sitting in on the class. The teacher referred to students as sisters and brothers. She wrote the main lesson

plan on the board. The kids questioned why they only can learn that and if there is anything else they can learn. They went over *salah* and what was important about the prayer. They did this by using an ask and answer form of teaching. Only a few students were taking notes, most looked bored and were drawing in their notebooks. She seemed unprepared and kept looking at the lesson plan on her phone. When one student attempted to add to the conversation with information that was somewhat related, she ignored the comment. She then brought a female student to a board to write out a line in Arabic, having the students repeat the words after her, slowly stringing it together. She then had them practice writing it out, focusing on one student at a time and checking on their progress. Both the students and the teacher seemed disengaged with the material. She then moved on to talking about the companions of the Prophet Mohammad. She was reading to them and asked them to put their notebooks away and several refused to listen to her. One student even questioned her by saying “Why are you teaching when you don’t even know the answers?” She ended the session by having them list the five pillars of Islam, but she focused on *salah*. After that day, I did not get to see this instructor again.

In many other instances, teachers like Mina showed how well they were prepared for class despite the hard questions. It was the week after she taught the Battle of Badr, and she was about to teach the Battle of Uhud. She first elaborated on terms like spy and ambush and gave them an example of sending a spy into the other class. Mina gave all the background of the battle, showing her preparation and peeking into the textbook only to get specific details like the number of warriors. She explained the conflict between the youth and the elders in how to handle the battle. She then utilized the board to draw how the battle was set up and how the Quraysh and the Muslims moved

in the battle. This battle is interesting in that Muslims were defeated. She explained how the Muslims failed and disobeyed Allah by leaving their post before they were told. Although only two students were taking notes, all of them were paying attention to the lecture. The students would interrupt occasionally, and Mina would allow it if it pertained to the material. As the class progressed, children started asking very detailed questions, and Mina had no issues saying she did not know the answer. One girl commented how she liked that the class taught about the battles that were lost, not just the victories. She ended the class by talking about the burial practices after the battle; how instead of mass graves they capped the body count to two to three per grave. There was even a general question about the burial ritual, why all Muslims must face Mecca when they are buried. She explained this was the practice of the Prophet.

These examples show that children are not always passive recipients of religious knowledge. They were able to ask questions about any detail—no matter how minute it was. Even when they seemed to be uninterested, they would baffle teachers with their unexpected questions. They showed their potential to question certain behaviors—even if that behavior came from a historically respected figure. As elementary school-aged students, they did not question the curriculum, but they were watchful about the classroom management of their teachers. Some extroverts had extra pleasure for asking plenty of “What if” questions. Teachers, in general, were patient about these questions. Both Mina and Mahmood were comfortable in saying “I do not know,” if they were not sure about the answer.

Unlike AIM, FCM was able to adapt quickly to the conditions of the pandemic once it got over the initial shock. After a few months of hiatus, it re-started online, this time through Zoom meetings. Unfortunately, the online setting was definitely not

optimal for capturing the attention of the children. Teachers in general were enthusiastic, and they tried very hard to engage the seemingly uninterested students. Initially, about a third of the students had their cameras on, but a few weeks later, very few kids, as little as 10-15 percent, had their cameras on. It seemed as though they had become used to the class and now did not feel the need to turn them on during these Zoom meetings. They turned on their cameras more when they played an online game or took a quiz as part of the class. Most classes featured between 15 to 20 students. The topics were similar to the face-to-face classes—such as the life of the Prophet, Islamic history, growing up in America as a Muslim, and being a good person. It was clear that children were more enthusiastic during in-person classes. Also, there was no way to monitor children during an online session, especially whether they were looking at something else on their computer screen or not, unless a family member was around.

Brother Ali was teaching online almost all elementary school level students. He was not present in the face-to-face portion earlier before the pandemic. He told stories about his experience as a Muslim growing up and some of the adversities he encountered while trying to be a good Muslim. For example, he talked about how he used to be afraid to find a place to pray at school that was both not *haraam* (Islamically forbidden) and was socially acceptable so that he would not get bullied. A couple of students asked him, “Why were you not able to pray in the bathroom?” or “Why did people bully you?” The teacher tried to explain the concept of Islamophobia, but the students did not seem to process that explanation. Given that these elementary school children do not possess much of an identity marker, perhaps except for their names for a few of them, they might not have encountered traumatic incidents yet.

Another casual discussion that Ali had with the students during this class was about how there is a domino effect of doing good deeds. He even talked about how the class he was teaching was purposeful, because he wanted to do good deeds as part of practicing Islam. A student asked whether attending Sunday school was a good deed for which he would get “credit.” Another question that was asked was “Do you only teach because you want the good deed or do you actually like us?” The teacher had to reiterate that he did love teaching, but he was also doing it for the good deed. Again, since this was an online session, it was hard to find out whether children understood Ali’s point.

Zoom meetings turned regular class lectures into PowerPoint presentations. For example, there was a PowerPoint on the significance of “wudu,” ritual ablution. Ali talked about why it was important and why he did it. After the PowerPoint, he asked the students what they thought about it, and the students stayed mostly quiet. One student asked what to do if they could not perform wudu, and if they would still have to find a way to pray, and the teacher told him yes. Another student asked why again. It seemed that they did not understand the part of praying in which one must give up part of your day to practice Islam.

Ali also taught Arabic on Zoom, but these language lessons did not have anything religious in content. He again used PowerPoints to teach his class. FCM Arabic classes were not as good as the ones in AIM probably because most of the instructors at FCM were not native speakers of Arabic.

There were also classes for sixth graders on Zoom, something that did not exist before the pandemic. The female instructor’s name was Asma. I was only allowed to attend her class once. There were 15 kids in this class, all of them without their cameras on. Their age definitely contributed to the apparent lack of interest compared to lower

level students. She was sharing her screen and teaching a lesson on what is *halal*, permissible, and what is *haram*, forbidden. The slides included examples of types of food that were *haram*, how to make sure meat is halal, and examples. At the end, Asma showed pictures of different foods, like a chicken or glass of wine, and asked if anyone knew which was which. Different students would unmute and answer the questions, which showed that they were at least paying attention. The last part of the class consisted of a small, very slow discussion about Islam's viewpoints on social issues, like duties of children towards parents. The teacher mostly asked some questions about what their experiences are like as a young Muslim person, such as "Do you help your parents cook and clean?" A random student after a long pause would respond and talk about what their parent-child relationship is like by saying, "My parents and I talk about mutual respect a lot." She also asked what the students thought about Islam's position on dating. One of the girls said, "I'm not allowed!" Asma responded to say how dating can be okay if it is *halal*. To date with the intention of marriage and without premarital sex (which is *Haram*), can be okay. However, she emphasized that each family is different, and how there are many aspects of pre-marital dating that are not considered okay in many Muslim families. Because they did not have much time in the end, they had to finish the conversation abruptly.

I observed more bi-directionality during teacher-student interactions at FCM compared to AIM. Young teachers facilitated student interactions by allowing questions and comments in a democratic manner. They also catered to their creativity through hands-on activities. Nevertheless, the emphasis on Muslim identity at FCM was same as it was at AIM, with less emphasis on *dawah*. Instead, the school tried to instill the "cool Islam" image compatible with the American culture.

Turkish Cultural Center (TCC)

With the first two schools, I have situated them as they related to Islam (e.g., mainstream, progressive or conservative). With this third school, I need to situate it in terms of a particular social movement and its relation to the Turkish context.

Situating the TCC

The weekend school that operates under Turkish Cultural Center (TCC) belongs to the Gülen Movement, a faith-based social movement founded in Turkey in 1960s (Ergil 2012). TCC belongs to an umbrella organization that operates three types of organizations. The first type of organization is the cultural center that promotes Turkish culture. The second type is the mosque under which their weekend school operates. The third one is the interfaith dialogue institution that serves as a connection between the Turkish community and the wider American society. During my observations, the community founded a non-profit educational organization which became the governing body of the weekend school.

Turkish-Americans are relatively a new immigrant community in the United States (Kaya 2005). Their number steadily increased only after the 1960s and 1970s with the immigration of skilled individuals such as doctors and engineers (Akçapar 2009). Inheriting a collapsed Ottoman Empire, Turks are about to celebrate the centennial anniversary of the Turkish Republic. Indeed, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk founded the Turkish Republic, in 1923, based upon secular premises that were borrowed from France (Zürcher 2004). The French type of secularism is fundamentally different from an Anglo-American type of secularism in that religious symbols are generally not

avored in public spaces (Kuru 2009). Atatürk's secular republic did not favor religious communities, either, as he banned all *tariqahs*, or religious orders, and shut down the madrassahs (Baran 2010). This created a deep trauma within religious and conservative communities in Turkey. On top of that, religious communities were excluded from the government bureaucracy during the initial years of the Republic. According to Mardin (1973), the Republican People's Party (CHP) represented the bureaucratic center, while the Democrat Party represented the democratic periphery. He argued that the CHP—as the single party of Turkish politics in the first two decades of the Republic, as well as the party through which the state shaped its policies—failed to “establish contact with the rural masses” (Mardin 1973: 186). All reforms of the government were made so that the actors of the center could prosper. Eventually, the periphery became disillusioned with this leadership.

In the aftermath of the official shutdown of the *tariqahs*, informal religious communities began to flourish, including the Nur Movement, the predecessor of what is known as The Gülen Movement (GM). GM is a faith-based social movement that emerged at the end of 1960s under the leadership of Fethullah Gülen, a Turkish Muslim preacher who has been in self-exile in Pennsylvania since 1999. The Gülen Movement broke away from the Nur Movement, founded by Said Nursi, a Kurdish Sunni Muslim theologian born in Eastern Turkey in the late 1800s. Nursi wrote the *Risale-i Nur* (Treatise of Light), a thematic Qur'anic commentary (Vahide 2005:13). Gülen, also known as “Hocaefendi” (esteemed teacher) by his followers, was born in 1941 in Erzurum, Turkey. Working as a state-appointed imam and preacher in various cities, he encouraged his early followers to open educational institutions in Turkey and abroad (Çetin 2010).

Surviving through the conflict-ridden times of the 1970s and adopting a non-violent and education-focused approach, the Movement considerably expanded starting in the 1980s (Yavuz 2013). Initially opening private dormitories for high school and college students, the Movement began to open private schools, first, all around Turkey in the 1980s, then, in Central Asian countries in the 1990s, and finally, in some countries in Africa and Asia in the 2000s (Hendrick 2013). Described as *Hizmet* (meaning “service” in Turkish) by its members, the Movement transformed from a small grassroots community to a wider social movement.

Erdoğan, the current president of Turkey, came to power under such conditions. The conservative majority saw him as a “savior” because, first of all, he inherited a country in deep financial crisis. Secondly, the conservative majority had some traumatic experiences with the military establishment in the second half of the 1990s, such as the headscarf ban for state employees and college students (Rosen 2005). Consequently, many religious communities, including the Gülen Movement, initially supported him. Yet, once he consolidated his power, he displayed more authoritarian tendencies against ethnic and religious minorities in Turkey (Baran 2010). an ally of the Erdoğan government in Turkey, the Movement came under fire after the 2013 corruption scandal in Turkey. Then Prime Minister Erdoğan claimed that the scandal was revealed by the police officers and prosecutors affiliated with the Movement (Orucoglu 2015). Starting from late 2013, the Erdoğan government launched a crackdown on GM, which peaked in July 2016, in the aftermath of the failed coup attempt against the Turkish government, for which GM was blamed. Eventually, hundreds of Movement-related K-12 schools, dormitories, media outlets, and hospitals were shut down; movement

members were fired from their government jobs; many of them were jailed; and their properties were confiscated (BBC 2016).

Thousands of GM members fled Turkey to avoid persecution, particularly after July 2016. This persecution included the following: They were expelled from their government or private sector jobs, most of their properties (including their bank accounts) were seized, their college diplomas were voided, their businesses were shut down, and at least one family member or a relative of a movement member is currently in prison in Turkey (Öztürk 2019). Having spread throughout the world, most GM members immigrated to Muslim-minority countries (Balci 2018). Many, in particular, immigrated to the United States and applied for an investor's visa or they sought asylum. They have arrived at their new countries after the onset of traumatic experiences in their homeland (Dumovich 2018). On top of that, some Movement members could not bring their spouses or children to the places to which they immigrated. How many have immigrated, however, is difficult to quantify: there are no reliable data about the numbers of Turks with the GM membership in the United States, in general, or in the city I studied, in particular.

The Gülen Movement's most important organization in the United States is called the Alliance for Shared Values (AFSV), which serves as the umbrella organization for all Movement-affiliated, non-profit organizations. Its description of the Gülen Movement, called here the "Hizmet Movement," is a little different from the image known in the public. For example, the Movement is commonly described as a religious movement (Balci 2014), but the AFSV rejects this description:

Hizmet Movement promotes philanthropy and community service, invests in education for cultivating virtuous individuals, and organizes intercultural and interfaith dialogue for peaceful

coexistence. [...] Hizmet is not a religious effort. [...] One of the core ideals of Hizmet is not just an emphatic acceptance of religious, cultural, social and political diversity, but actual celebration of this diversity because Hizmet participants consider this diversity as divine will.” [...] Hizmet participants believe that such acceptance is not contrary to one’s devotion to religion, but indeed respecting and embracing fellow humans at the level of our common humanity is part of one’s devotion. [...] Hizmet participants are inspired by the ideas, life example and vision of Fethullah Gülen, who advocated for deeper personal spiritual devotion that is expressed in social work through the understanding that serving fellow humans is serving God (Alliance for Shared Values n.d.).

As seen in this paragraph, the Movement is using ambiguous language with several buzzwords. According to Hendrick (2013: 206), “The GM network is characterized by an ambiguous system of strong and weak social ties and client-patron relationships that extend throughout the global economy. Nonetheless, Balci (2018: 70) draws a clearer picture: “The movement prioritizes excellence in secular education over religious proselytization and engages in interfaith dialogue and economic, business and commercial exchanges with its host societies.”

There has been a recent flurry of scholarship on the survival strategies and diaspora-building efforts of GM members in Australia (Tittensor 2018), Italy (Ozzano 2018), the United Kingdom (Tee 2018), France (Balci 2018), Malaysia (Saleem and Osman 2019), and Senegal (Angey 2018). (However, I could not find a recent study that exclusively focuses on the American case). This scholarship shows that the movement members have been transforming themselves from being a migrant community to displaying the characteristics of a diaspora. As the literature on diaspora suggests, GM members have been maintaining a collective memory of their homeland (Turkey); they consider Turkey as their true home, to which they believe they will eventually return; they are committed to the restoration and improvement of their homeland; and their

homeland shapes their identity (Bauböck and Faist 2010; Brubaker 2005; Cohen 2008). In their respective diasporas, they help each other financially, politically, spiritually, and socially. I call these efforts “inter-diaspora solidarity.”

Barzegar (2011: 525) categorizes the members of GM in the United States as part of “Abrahamic Americanism, [which] fuses Islamic concepts and American civic discourses of citizenship, constitutionalism, and pluralism.” However, there have been some traditional Islamic practices within the TCC. First, there is usually no woman on the mosque board, or only one woman is occasionally elected or appointed. Second, they have a partition in the main prayer hall. Finally, their middle and high school programs are gender segregated. For these reasons, I described the mosque as “semi-progressive” and have included “Homeland Homesick” as another category in Barzegar’s (2011) classification for the reasons I laid out above.

The TCC in Action

As mentioned in the introduction, unlike FCM and AIM, TCC runs its weekend school on Saturdays. While this seems like a small detail, it actually tells us a lot about the lack of integration within the Turkish community. Almost all Muslim weekend schools are on Sunday in the United States (Bagby 2012) because Saturdays are usually dedicated to extracurricular activities such as soccer practices, piano lessons, chess tournaments, etc. However, the Turkish community, at least until recently, has regarded Sundays as family time. Many families go to picnics or they visit each other for breakfast and other activities. That is why it has become a tradition with the Gülen Movement-affiliated weekend schools that they operate on Saturdays. I confirmed this during their monthly online meetings, which are attended by teachers and administrators from more

than 20 cities. Also, despite being financially comfortable, not all Turkish families send their children to extracurricular activities on Saturdays. This also makes Saturday weekend school the best time for most families. However, in my interviews with Turkish families, I have noticed that more and more families are sending their children to Saturday activities, making Sunday school a possibility in the future for these families.

The four main classes taught at TCC are Character Education, Qur'an recitation and memorization, Turkish, and STEAM, short for Science, Technology, Education, Arts, and Math. Some classes were changed in some terms. For example, before the pandemic, there was an arts and crafts class that was replaced by online mind-games during the pandemic. There was no one to teach this class after the pandemic, and it went away with STEAM taking its place. Furthermore, Qur'an recitation and memorization classes were handled by Turkish teachers before and after the pandemic, but the administration hired Egyptian teachers to teach the Qur'an so that students would learn from native speakers.

The school population changed in every semester that I observed, including those during the pandemic. In the pre-pandemic period, there were around 30 students between the ages of five and eleven. During the pandemic, the online student population almost doubled because some students from other states also attended the school. After the pandemic, the school was re-opened with 35 students, but it gradually increased to 50 during the Spring semester. However, the age groups of students always remained the same. The main reason for the dramatic change in the number of students, beyond the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, was parental expectation and satisfaction. When TCC shifted to online classes, they made some advertisement in the (online) community. For example, they said the Qur'an teachers would be from Egypt. There would be a class

called “mind games,” generating interest in the school. Likewise, when the fall semester was generally a success, more parents sent their children to TCC in the spring.

During my observations, TCC changed their principal six times. One principal did the same job twice one year apart. Likewise, some principals later stepped down to become a teacher or sometimes teachers were promoted to become a principal. FCM had the same principal during my initial face-to-face observation and subsequent online observation.

Classes were not segregated by gender at TCC. The instruction language was mostly Turkish in the pre-pandemic period. It became mostly English during the pandemic. Finally, it became a mixture of Turkish and English in the post-pandemic period, Turkish still being favored more by teachers, whereas students mostly preferred English. Most of the teachers were female before and after the pandemic, but there were two male teachers, including a researcher, during the pandemic. There were also some middle and high school volunteers, all female, particularly helping with the Qur’an memorization activities and recess, and sometimes acting as teacher aids.

Before the pandemic, TCC’s weekend school opened with 30 students from kindergarten to fifth grade in the fall semester of 2019. They merged some classes to have a decent number of students in each class. Because they only had four classes to offer (Character Education, Turkish, Qur’an, and STEAM), they were able to find four teachers to teach. Later on, they were able to find more teachers to teach the Qur’an. Two of their teachers were newcomers, so their English was not good. The other two were oldcomers, but only Maryam’s English was good enough to teach Islam in English.

The TCC weekend school’s administrators, like the rest of the decision-makers in the Turkish community, believed in the necessity of teaching Islam in Turkish so that

children would not forget their mother tongue. They treated Turkish as *lingua sacra*, the sacred language. Despite being a transnational movement, Turkey and Turkishness is still at the center of the Movement, whose members have been maintaining a collective memory of their homeland (Turkey). They consider Turkey as their true home to which, they believe, they will eventually return. They are committed to the restoration and improvement of their homeland, and their homeland shapes their identity. These are all in line with the literature on diaspora (Bauböck and Faist 2010; Brubaker 2005; Cohen 2008). That is why decision-makers of the Movement wanted to make sure Turkish is taught at the weekend school. Some parents also send their children not just to learn about Islam, but also to improve their Turkish, and to socialize with other Turkish friends.

During my observations, four themes were salient at TCC. First, they provided a “light Islam” that would not include much of the Islamic history, or theology, but rather emphasize the love of God and Prophet Muhammad along with some encouragement of the rituals. Second, the Islamic education was reward-based. Students were presented rewards whenever they observed the rituals, performed prayers, or engaged in good manners. Third, students were not passive recipients of the content; therefore, some apparent tension between teachers (predominantly embracing Turkish language and Turkish culture) and students (predominantly embracing English language and American culture), existed which led to constant negotiation and power struggles between the two groups—linguistically, culturally, and partly theologically. Fourth, teaching the rituals and prayers were considered part of Islamic morality, where one could only be a decent person by fulfilling their Islamic duties first and foremost, although this theme slightly changed during and after the pandemic.

The first theme, “Light Islam,” was salient at TCC’s weekend school. The term implies that the Islam they teach at TCC did not include Islamic history; therefore, the battles of the Prophet were excluded from the curriculum. While AIM and FCM are about giving basic Islamic knowledge and history, TCC usually strives to help students contemplate about and find Allah through His creation. Since Islam has been associated with terrorism and violence, particularly since 9/11, TCC administrators wanted to make sure that nothing violent, no matter how legitimate, is presented to the students. That is why they did not include any class that would teach Islamic history or the life of Prophet Muhammad. Arabic classes at AIM and FCM were replaced by Qur’an recitation and memorization classes at TCC. There were two obvious reasons for that. First, nobody spoke Arabic at the weekend school. In fact, except for the imam of the mosque, I did not meet anyone who *could* speak Arabic in the Turkish community. Second, the community focuses more on the Turkish language and culture. They did teach Qur’an recitation and memorization, but they engaged in the commentary or Turkish or English translation of the verses they helped them recite or memorize.

Defne’s classes were the typical of the “Light Islam” approach. She would combine character traits with creation and with love of Allah and love for His Prophet. In almost every character education class, a character trait was taught through a story in which the main character was mostly an animal. By talking about a certain skill of an animal, such as the ability to build a cocoon for a silkworm, Defne would ask her students who bestowed this ability to silkworms only to get the same response (Allah) over and again. She used the same lesson plans and read the same stories for the first and the fifth graders.

In one class, for example, she showed a short clip of woodpeckers, encouraging students to marvel at their creation, saying: “Look, how beautiful Allah has created this bird. Allah assigned a special duty to these birds. The woodpecker is pecking the tree like 20 times.” She then asked, “What is she doing with her beak?” After getting the correct answer that the woodpecker was helping the tree, Defne tied this to the idea that everything in nature lives in perfect harmony and relationship, and that in this system, everyone and everything has a responsibility: “Do you think the woodpecker says, ‘No, I don’t wanna do this?’” Children gave Defne the response she was looking for. This process of looking at animals and making remarks about their creation was repeated with other animals in every class. The larger lesson being reinforced is that, as human beings, we can explore our surroundings and learn something—not just about the natural world but about the Creator. When responding to her students’ comments about the animals—for example when one student gave an interesting fact about woodpeckers—Defne used exaggerated gestures and sounds, like “No way! I didn’t know that!”

Defne, later during the day, said Abraham also looked at the dinosaurs to understand who his Creator was. This was fascinating because humans only appeared on Earth million years later after the extinction of dinosaurs (Vogel 2017). I think she introduced this element to make the lesson more entertaining. She added dinosaurs to the religious parable, and children either did not know this simple fact, or they just thought Abraham might have looked at the dinosaur fossils; so, nobody noticed this anachronistic error.

There were a few classes in which Defne did something that she had not done in previous lessons. For example, she once directed the children to look at the wall, at a

fabric poster with an astronaut. She asked them to tell her what the astronaut is doing. Before the children could respond, the class was interrupted by the sound of the bell. This was not because the period had ended, but because the bell system had not been configured properly and it was ringing at odd times during the day. Making light of the situation, Defne mimed playing the violin before continuing to discuss the astronaut who was observing the Earth from the Moon. Artfully, she connected the poster to a larger discussion about creation. “Who does this Earth belong to?” she asked. “To us,” was the answer. “And who created this Earth?” The children answered all at once, “Allah.” Defne acted as if she was in awe of this and said, “So our Allah must be so powerful to be able to create the entire earth and even space. Wow!” Although children’s answers were sometimes automatic, that does not necessarily mean they understood or interpreted the material the same way their teachers did. For example, in another class, Defne told everyone they were going to have a big dream together. So, she asked a student, “You are in the spaceship. Where would you like to go?” He wanted to go to a jungle. Others said they should go to space, to the moon, or to the sun. One student even said that they should go to Allah, to which Defne responded that Allah was everywhere. This pantheistic response was also utilized by some Turkish parents when they tried to evade the question, “Where is Allah?”—although they are theologically or philosophically nowhere near Pantheism.

Going back to the astronaut, and now speaking in English, she asked the students to consider what the astronaut might have been thinking. The children also shifted to using English. Defne turned off the light to create an ambiance that mimicked outer space. She lowered her voice and used her glowing blue light ball to illuminate the poster. The children also began speaking in a lower voice. Some said the astronaut must

have been thinking about his childhood, or what was currently happening on Earth, or would have wanted to go back. In relaying these thoughts, Defne pointed out that the natural world was evidence of God's existence and His perfection. The children responded to her last question by saying that God had created everything like this because he loved us.

Defne would sometimes connect the topic to Prophet Muhammad. She liked romanticizing when she described him. For example, she said of the Prophet, "He was the reason for the creation of the Earth and the stars. He was the king of all the realms." She would also connect the religious importance of the Prophet to the importance of adopting his behaviors, trusting his wisdom, and following his word by saying: "If our dear Prophet said it, this gives us a good feeling and it means it must have a special meaning."

Teaching Turkish to lower level children at TCC, Bilgen previously was an elementary school teacher in Turkey. She came to the United States after her Gülen Movement-affiliated school was shut down by the government. At the time of my observations, her English language skills were almost non-existent. So, she would read Turkish storybooks, some religious in content. Most of these books would talk about the creation of Allah and the evidence for His existence. Her teaching style was different from Defne, being more on the mechanistic side. For example, she would read a sentence or two and then ask questions about them. Unlike Defne, she would rarely show emotion even when the story comes to a peak point.

One day, she was reading about appreciating one's own health and giving thanks to Allah. While everyone was giving examples of being thankful to Allah, one boy said, "Girls pray behind the men," referring to the prayer arrangement at the mosque. This

abrupt statement was clearly off-topic, but it was also revealing that children as young as five years old were taking note of such gender-based arrangements. “Some men never obey Allah,” remarked another student following the first statement. This remark was followed by a flurry of comments, including another student who said, “My father never prays.” At that moment, Bilgen felt the need to interrupt and started talking about Ramadan, although it was not Ramadan yet. This time children started talking about their family practices. “My mom wakes up for *sahoor* (pre-dawn meal), but my dad doesn’t,” noted another student. Bilgen tried to bring the topic to Ramadan practices. “Children don’t have to fast,” a student commented. She must have heard this statement from her parents. Bilgen approved this statement saying, “You are still too young.” Another student said, “I chant the names of Allah while I count my beads.” “Girls wear headscarves and boys wear kufis,” another student noted. When students spoke like a stream of consciousness, they revealed plenty of key information about their family as much as what they had been taught by them. They seemed to have internalized, if not accepted, the gender roles in their community when it comes to religious practices.

Bilgen’s in-class incident brings us to the second theme, which is the agency of children at the weekend school. The children's agency manifested itself in several ways at TCC. They sometimes asked a difficult question that the teacher had a hard time answering. Sometimes, they would not agree with some of the classroom rules. This caused negotiation and power struggle between students and teachers. Another area of contention was over language use. Most teachers exclusively spoke Turkish, while students preferred English. Also, some children acted unruly by taking advantage of the language barrier or insufficient classroom management skills of their teachers. These unruly behaviors would even include bullying.

Sevil was another Character Education teacher who would teach upper grade levels during the pre-pandemic period. Similar to Bilgen, she had recently come from Turkey. Although her English was better than Bilgen's, she preferred to speak Turkish. Also, she seemed inexperienced in teaching, particularly in the American setting. Relevant to the first theme, she was talking about the importance of being thankful to God. She played a YouTube video in Turkish with English subtitles. The video was titled "Why Should We Pray?" Students were mostly inattentive. One was playing on his own, two others were speaking to each other, another pair were busy with something. The three male students sitting in the front were the only ones watching the video. Sevil did not notice the ones at the back as she had turned off the lights for the video. After watching a video, a girl asked, "Who created God?" Sevil responded to the question in a manner that did not seem to satisfy the student. "We can't easily comprehend that. We only use 3-4% of our brain. That is why we can't understand this. Don't think about it too much. We will learn in the Hereafter." She not only could not provide a satisfactory answer, but she postponed it to the Hereafter. She also mentioned the incapacity of human beings, citing an oft-repeated ten-percent myth, which claims that people use only ten percent of their brain. I knew the myth was also popular among the Turkish community, but it came as a surprise for the teachers to come up with this answer, which also showed that teachers were not intellectually or theologically fully prepared for such difficult questions.

In another class, a question about what invalidates one's *salat* was asked. Sevil tried to give all the jurisprudential details in her answer such as bleeding, breaking wind, fainting, etc. Since breaking wind was one of them, children were making fun of some of the bodily movements. Suddenly, a girl asked an unexpected question: "What if

your water breaks? Will it invalidate your *salat*?" The question was about the water breaking process that happens just before labor for pregnant women, but it came from a fifth grader. Sevil did not know what to say for a split second. She quickly gave an affirmative response and changed the subject. At the lunch break, I heard Sevil share the incident with other teachers and all of them looked stunned.

Children's difficult questions included "Why?" questions. In one of the stories, Defne read aloud, the main character chose to "come clean" with his mother because he felt guilty and uncomfortable. Then, she began to ask the class questions about the book. However, most of the answers were not serious. Speaking about honesty, she asked "What is the rule of honesty?" She answered the question herself and taught the students that "We should never be afraid of telling the truth, ok? You will feel better if you tell the truth." One student simply asked "Why?" This was a perfectly valid question, but I do not think a satisfactory answer was given by Defne, who said, "Because our heart always takes the side of the truth. It gets happy when we tell the truth, gets upset when we lie." However, this statement was somewhat of a tautology. The question of why an individual of sound heart should prefer the truth was not addressed.

Defne's classes featured additional examples where children disagreed with their teachers. For example, when a raindrop spoke in a story, a student asked how come a raindrop could speak. Defne said, "We are pretending, honey." In another story, the two main characters travelled in a desert. The students then got to a part of the book in which the characters were confronted by a lion. One child immediately protested. "Wait a minute. Lions live in Africa, not in deserts!" Defne's classes were rife with such examples, which clearly show that children were not hesitant to voice their

disagreements, pointing to the fact that children's agency enabled the bi-directionality at TCC. But as we shall see below, this agency manifested itself in several ways.

In another Character Education class, Maryam, who has been in the United States for more than a decade, said "It is forbidden to harm an animal on purpose." "What about qurban?" asked a student—reminding the teacher of the ritual sacrifice animal during Eid al-Adha, one of the two major religious festivals in Islam. Unfortunately, Maryam did not hear the question, as she was trying to get the attention of an uninterested student and the student who asked the question did not repeat it. But this example revealed that students deliberately or inadvertently brought up controversial topics.

Abraham's story of sacrificing his child is a well-known story in Islam. A literal interpretation of this story caused some problems with children at TCC because they could not comprehend some of the extraordinary parts of the story. In one of the summer school classes, students were watching an animation movie about Abraham's sacrifice story. Towards the end of the story, the narrator said, "A lamb came from the sky and saved Ishmael." As soon as the video was over, a student raised his hand. "Why would a lamb come from the sky? Was it coming out of space?" The teacher did not answer this question, and she just smiled. While watching the earlier parts of the animation, children complained about the low quality of the production. There was a part that showed only sand for a couple of minutes, with the narration going on in the background. "This movie is just showing sand," someone complained. Later when Abraham appeared, he was literally faceless. "Why aren't they showing his face?" "Because nobody knows what he looked like. They lived in old times. They want to make sure they portray them accurately. That is why they don't show their faces." These

criticisms must have worked because in the next class, as the teacher decided not to show the movie. Instead, she narrated the story by herself.

In addition to challenging moral and theological premises, TCC children challenged any cultural norm that was not in compliance with American culture. Such cultural differences between teachers and students surfaced on some occasions. For example, one day, Buse, another teacher who briefly served for TCC and spoke only Turkish in the classroom due to her language barrier, wanted to have her students read a paragraph from a text. She said, "Let's start with the boys." A female student reminded her in English, "Ladies first," but Buse did not understand what she said. After a few tries, another student translated the phrase into Turkish saying "Kızlardan başlamanız gerekir önce," which means "You have to start with the girls first." Buse's response was "Let's start with the boys this time." Here, we see that students challenged a patriarchal Turkish practice with something common in American culture. Of course, Buse, as a woman, might not have had any ill intention when deciding to start with boys. Yet again, dividing students on the basis of race or gender in a classroom setting in the United States is not something common, whereas as someone who completed his K-12 education in Turkey would have found in commonplace.

This incident could have been interpreted as a one-time event, but a very similar one occurred in another class with another teacher. It was an arts and crafts class for the kindergarteners, and they were about to begin a new activity. After counting the students (four boys and two girls), the teacher said, "There are four boys. Let's start with them." Hearing this, the seventh-grade teacher assistant said, "There are also four girls here, counting herself and the teacher as well." While the teacher ignored this comment, it clearly demonstrated that the power struggle was taking place even between a

Turkish-born teacher and her American-born assistant. Growing up with equality between genders, these children do not silently accept any kind of preferential treatment even if it is innocent.

In addition to protesting what teachers said, children would also police each other. One day a student brought in some cupcakes to share because the next Monday was his birthday. One kid said that the cupcakes are not halal. This caused some anxiety in the students before the kid told them that he was kidding. A similar disagreement regarding halal vs. non-halal foods took place just a few minutes later. Sencan was eating Cheetos, but the other students vehemently told her that the snack was not halal. She got defensive about this and asserted that they were. Sencan had not shown herself to be particularly concerned about religion or being religious in other classes, but eating strictly halal was part of group identity, so she defended her Cheetos. Even if they may not know all the particulars of halal and non-halal ingredients, this group of fourth and fifth graders showed an awareness of what is permissible and what is not, as well as warning each other about the potential pitfalls. However, their perspectives were contingent on what their parents conceived as halal or how strict their parents were with checking the ingredients of the foods they consumed.

Children's policing would also take place about other hot button issues such as American cultural holidays. One day, Güzin asked for permission to talk about a toy ring she had with her. She asked the class to guess where she got it. They all knew that she picked it up during Halloween. This prompted a discussion among the students about the acceptability of celebrating that American holiday. Sencan, who was at the center of attention during the Cheetos incident was addressed by Necip—a student who barely spoke Turkish but demonstrated a firm connection to what he believed are the

requirements of his religion. He asked Sencan, “Wait, did you celebrate Halloween?” Meliha’s gut response was to immediately say, “No!” Necip must not have believed her, because he said, “Well, you’re not supposed to—that’s not our religion.” Sencan insisted that, “Yes, you can.” Necip seriously denied it, and he even questioned her faith by asking, “Are you even Muslim?”

The most common area of contention at TCC weekend school was the issue of language. Students, except for maybe one or two who had just come from Turkey, were fluent in English. At least two thirds of the students either were born in the United States or started their schooling in the US. The remaining students had been here for at least two years, which allowed them to gain sufficient English proficiency. This stark difference between teachers and students led to a constant negotiation and power struggle regarding the linguistic and cultural preferences. Some teachers strived to enforce Turkish in their classes at all costs, while some of them used a mixture of Turkish and English or *Turklish*.

Teachers, particularly the newcomers, must have initially assumed that whatever Turkish word they uttered, it was understood by all students because students’ parents must have been speaking Turkish at home as part of their daily language. They realized that this simple assumption did not work in their favor. Even the most supposedly easy words ended up not being understood by some students. On one occasion, when a teacher said Ramadan will start next “Pazartesi,” one student asked, “What is Pazartesi?” She said “Monday.” In the aforementioned Abraham story, the teacher told students “Allah did not want Abraham to sacrifice his son; so, He sent him a *kurban*, meaning sacrificial animal.” But a student understood this word as *kurbağa* (frog). “Did Allah send him a frog?” she curiously asked.

The most obvious example of the lack of Turkish proficiency was the Turkish classes for the fifth graders. Ahmet, the only male teacher at the weekend school during the pre-pandemic period, was teaching the debate class. Actually, there was no debate class, the name of the class was Turkish, but Ahmet would prefer to call the class ‘The Debate Hour,’ with the assumption that the students’ fluency would be good enough to engage in a meaningful debate in Turkish. As part of the lesson plan, Ahmet would divide the class into two groups and reveal the topic to be discussed. Most of the time, after the presentation of the topic (usually a moral one), the language would shift from Turkish to English in a few minutes. Sometimes, some students would have a hard time comprehending certain words in the topic. For instance, one day, Ahmet told the topic in Turkish. “When a person commits a crime, who is the responsible party? Himself or the society?” A student, born in the United States, immediately asked “What is *toplum* (society)?” Not remembering the English word “society,” Mr. Ahmet tried to explain in Turkish, but the student demanded an English explanation. That was initially rejected by the teacher on the grounds that the class was about speaking Turkish. Later with the help of other students, he had to tell her the English translation of the word. All debates, without exception, started in Turkish and continued in English within a couple of minutes. Students were literally begging their teacher to express their opinion in English because their Turkish vocabulary was insufficient for debating about an advanced topic. Indeed, when the topic got deeper, students could not come up with the Turkish equivalent of certain concepts. Ahmet would only accept student requests with the use of Turkish along with English, but again, after a few minutes some students would turn to English-only sentences. So, the language children spoke in debate classes was a healthy mixture of Turkish and English. But this case also shows that students insisted

on their preferential language, and this constant negotiation and power struggle occupied a great deal during the religious socialization process at the Saturday school.

Turkish presented plenty of challenges to students, particularly when they were given the task of reading and writing. Children's reading and writing skills ranged from non-existent to above average. Writing, particularly, felt cumbersome for most students, something many did not want to engage in—especially if the text that had to be written was long. In Turkish classes, children's mood considerably changed, displaying boredom and disinterestedness, in most cases.

Some newcomer students were naturally comfortable in both languages, particularly if they were in the fourth grade or higher. For example, they were able to answer in Turkish if the question was posed in English. However, some students only spoke English, trying to impose their will through the utilization of English even though they were partly fluent in Turkish. This showed that students preferred a language they were comfortable with, but at the same time pointed to a power struggle. When they encountered a bilingual teacher like Maryam or Defne, whose character education class featured the use of both languages, both students and the teacher used a mixture of both languages in the classroom without bothering each other a lot. Even then, some students did not hesitate to correct their teachers' grammatical errors.

Even Arabic-dominated classes like Qur'an memorization featured the frequent use of Turkish. For example, Cemile's class focused on Qur'an recitation and memorization. Several high school girls volunteered for the class, helping Cemile. Some volunteers were born in the United States, while some of them came after the coup, yet all were fluent in English. Cemile always spoke Turkish, while the volunteers used English and Turkish to different degrees, depending on their backgrounds. The ones

born in the United States used a mixture of English and Turkish, the former being more dominant; while the newcomers generally used Turkish with occasional English explanations when a student had difficulty understanding a specific instruction. Qur'an memorization classes were the only trilingual venues within the Saturday school.

Teachers who used English more than the others received more attention in the class. One day, I was asked if I could substitute as a teacher, and I asked if I could read from an Islamic children's book written in English. After getting approval to do so, I chose a story that I used for my previous research about children's books. It was a historical story, yet students' attention markedly changed. I spoke English, not only when reading the book, but also while asking questions related to the book or when communicating a class rule. Students became more interested; they answered questions even without the promise of a reward. I was also asked to perform a puppet show for the end-of-semester program. I made the puppets speak both Turkish and English to measure student reaction. Although it was a hard task to do in the heat of the moment, one teacher approached after the show, commenting that students laughed more at English jokes.

A similar situation was observed in the first winter retreat during the pre-pandemic period. Two speakers, both male and over fifty, came to talk to the sixth and seventh graders. They spoke to the girls and boys on separate occasions. I was able to follow their sessions with the girls. Very knowledgeable as a theologian and famous in the Turkish community, the first speaker did not speak any English at all. Always sitting in his chair, he lectured on an Islamic topic in Turkish. The girls were visibly bored, some fell asleep, or silently talked to the ones sitting next to them. The speaker received only two questions at the end of his lecture. Possessing less knowledge, the second

speaker, who has been in the United States for a couple of decades, only spoke English, walked around the class, asked questions, and was asked many questions in return. The girls' interest was considerably different due to this language shift and the active classroom management of the second speaker.

Another salient case of the use of Turkish took place during religious celebrations or end-of-semester programs. Of the several that I observed, in all of them, students had to use Turkish most of the time. When reciting a verse from the Qur'an, they naturally used Arabic, but the religious songs or poems they performed were predominantly Turkish. Teachers selected these songs and poems, and children would then memorize them. During the events, it was obvious that some students did not know the meanings of some words in their poems or songs. Their pronunciation and intonation clearly showed their lack of proficiency in these words. These celebratory programs were intended to impress the parents to give the impression that "Your child's Turkish is improving," although it was not realistic to have this sort of expectation with only one class per week. One of the reasons parents sent their children to TCC is to allow them to make new friends from the Turkish community. Most of the time they do, but they speak English when they hang out together.

During the *Mawlid* (birth of Prophet Muhammad) celebration, some students wrote letters to Prophet Muhammad. All these letters were in Turkish. Later, I found out that these letters were assigned by their Turkish language teacher. I noticed that the students were encouraged to write in Turkish, although their writing skills were clearly better in English. The winners of the "best letters" read them on the stage, and again, some of them had a hard time with the proper pronunciation and intonation—giving the audience the impression that they might have received some help from a family

member. The only exception I observed with the otherwise all-Turkish celebrations was the hadith (Prophet's sayings) reading. Students chose one-sentence long sayings of Prophet Muhammad and read them on the stage in English.

One final issue between teachers and students was related to classroom management. The most serious complaint I (over)heard from teachers was the presence of unruly students, which made classroom management very difficult. Some parents and teachers noted that children were acting in a hyperactive manner compared to public school because children usually perceived weekend school as a fun place.

One day, Defne was teaching and Ozgur, a male student, was literally bullying the girl sitting next to him by calling her "Dumb! [You are] soo sooo dumb!" Since Defne was unaware of this, I stepped in and told him to stop. When they started to play an in-class game, Ozgur bullied the students who did not do well. His insults were genuinely hurtful, but perhaps not difficult to stop. I was astounded at the fact that no measures were taken to discipline the students or to put a stop to the bullying tendencies in the classroom. Ozgur would frequently insult others for the sake of his own ego, threaten others with violence, and at times actually hit other students. Ozgur frequently said that he would do something bad, so as to rile up the teacher or his classmates. However, this usually resulted in a "free pass" from the teacher. The most she did was to remind Ozgur that a specific behavior he was talking about (e.g., cheating) was not a good thing. When bad behavior was not rectified by the teacher, it also made other students spiteful and prone to acting out. When he (and other students like him) was not reprimanded, not only did the other students fall behind in learning, but they also became angry and sought to solve the issues in their own ways. For example, when Ozgur shoved someone, but the teacher did not warn him, the other student felt as if he had to get justice on his

own. Teachers, when reading a book, reminded the students that during the reading of the book, students could not be talking to one another, and did hint loud students would be sent to other classrooms. They made this warning at least once each week, but I have never actually seen them send a student out yet.

The third theme revealed was the extensive reward and incentive system practiced at TCC. Rewards were a large part of the education at TCC's Saturday school. Students were rewarded for almost everything at which they were good. The reward-based system could be seen almost at every place and opportunity. For example, a treasure box was located in the cafeteria. When a student displayed good behavior, their name was written on the list next to the treasure box. Eventually, students were entitled to win modest gifts from the box if they reached a certain number.

In addition to this overall reward system, each teacher had their own individual reward system. Keeping the tally of the rituals and the in-class follow up was a vital part of the education. For example, to keep track of the daily prayers that students performed, they were given weekly prayer charts. Each week, students had to pray one time more than the previous week to acquire the habit of five-time daily prayers. Sevim, in her classes, collected weekly prayer charts. Those student who performed their prayers were given candy. In another class, Maryam asked how many blessings the students chanted for Prophet Muhammad. She recorded the numbers and handed out rewards for those who did it. Even those who chanted meager numbers still earned a reward. Likewise, certain habits and practices, such as practicing some habits of Prophet Muhammad, were rewarded. Some rewards were in the form of tickets that could be converted to toys if collected at a certain amount. Relatively expensive toys required more tickets.

In addition to rituals and practices, character education classes also entailed rewards. In Maryam's class, students earned tickets based on how many good deeds or acts they had committed the previous week. Maryam proportionally handed out tickets based on the number of good deeds. While doing this, she also used positive reinforcements and praised the student who engaged in such an act.

Rewards were used on every occasion possible. For example, one day a student's parents threw a celebration party for their child who started performing his daily prayers regularly. This start of the daily prayers was interpreted as a landmark event and was celebrated with cakes and treats. The child also handed out school supplies and some gifts to his friends during the party celebrated during the lunch hour at the cafeteria.

The final theme revealed at TCC was the perception that rituals are part of morality. The weekend school always included Character Education. However, despite the name of the class, most teachers were focusing on rituals, prayers, and beliefs as part of good morals—again trying to create moral habitus through the rituals similar to AIM. Likewise, Buse's character education class usually focused on rituals and prayers instead of good character traits. For example, in several classes, she mentioned that in order to be a good person, one had to perform their daily prayers, love Prophet Muhammad, and fast in the month of Ramadan. While some character education classes (offered by Maryam and Defne) featured good character traits such as honesty, integrity, etc. in some others, teachers only taught the jurisprudential details of rituals and prayers. For example, teachers sometimes would act as the muftis who issue religious edicts or answer people's questions about Islamic law and its interpretation. They would always provide details about prayers or ritual ablutions as part of their classes. They would also

sometimes present optional or encouraged behaviors as mandatory rituals. For instance, when Buse asked about the name of the Prophet, a student said, “Muhammad.” She corrected that student saying, “We can’t just say Muhammad. We should say Muhammad Mustafa sallallahu aleyhi wa sallam.” This emotional connection sometimes caused teachers to overly romanticize Prophet Muhammad.

Towards the end of my observations, TCC had slowly shifted to prioritize good character traits. However, these traits were never taken up in a stand-alone manner. Instead, they were generally brought up in connection with belief in God or with love of Prophet Muhammad. Since they aimed to instill a kind of *light Islam*, most of Defne’s classes were similar in content. There was a story of an animal who did not display the best manners. The animal eventually learns about good manners, but Defne usually took children’s attention from the story’s content by focusing on how God created these animals and how we should always be thankful to Him.

Discussion

The three weekend schools I observed shared some similarities and had their differences. Table 3 summarizes the distinctive features of all three weekend schools based on six criteria—namely, use of rewards, existence of language classes, classroom management style, use of Islamic jargon and buzzwords, emphasis on *dawah* and Muslim identity, and the type of Islam instilled.

[Table 3 About Here]

Among the three Muslim weekend schools, AIM’s curriculum was closest to traditional Islam, reflecting the mosque board’s views. Controversial events and figures in history were excluded. Hot topics such as women’s rights or terrorism were presented

and viewed through an idealized lens. Likewise, American cultural holidays were usually looked down upon. Students, for example, were discouraged to celebrate Halloween.

FCM's weekend school policy was to instill a "cool Islam" approach. Thanks to being second or third generation immigrants, teachers were relatable to students. Like teachers at AIM, FCM teachers excluded controversial parts, but they were more open to taking questions. I saw a flyer for the upcoming Halloween, and they planned to celebrate it in their mosques, calling it *Halal-oween*. With this word play and flyer, they aimed at finding the middle ground between staying away from Halloween celebration and being part of it. This seems to be an interesting example for strategic assimilation. As for TCC's weekend school, they taught a "light Islam" in which historical and biographical topics were excluded. Instead, they focused on the knowledge of God through His creation and the love of God through His bounties bestowed on believers. TCC teachers also emphasized the love and respect for Prophet Muhammad, frequently romanticizing him by using literary expressions about him. The school did not touch cultural holidays, leaving it to the decision of parents. Thus, children mostly celebrated Halloween with their parents.

AIM and TCC teachers were mostly first generation immigrants from Syria and Turkey respectively, whereas FCM teachers were exclusively American-born. As a result, AIM and TCC teachers had some accents. But AIM teachers, thanks to their much earlier arrival in the US, were visibly more fluent than the ones at TCC, who had no college-aged teachers. The youngest teachers were in their 30s. Their English ranged from non-existent to advanced, but none of them were fluent. There were native speaker volunteers and teacher aids between the ages of 13-20, but these youngsters were never given the opportunity to teach at the weekend school. Some of them were employed in

Qur'an memorization classes, while a few of them were used as teacher aides. Turkish teachers, at best, used a mixture of Turkish and English, but those who were able to do it were the most popular ones. Those who exclusively spoke Turkish were not among the ones most liked by students.

Arabic was treated as a *lingua sacra* at AIM and FCM although English was the *lingua franca*, whereas at TCC, Turkish was both the *lingua franca* and *lingua sacra*. TCC did not offer any Arabic class, nor did they put forward a conscious effort to teach it. Arabic was reserved for Qur'an memorization and recitation. The overall Arabic competency of FCM teachers was nowhere near that of the teachers at AIM, mostly because the latter were first generation immigrants from the Middle East. To compensate for this, FCM employed Arabic teachers. AIM teachers were also more knowledgeable about the Qur'an and the hadith than the ones at FCM because they were frequently able to switch from English to Arabic when they wanted to recite a verse from the Qur'an or narrate one of the sayings of Prophet Muhammad. As for the Turkish teachers, I have never seen them reciting a Qur'anic verse in its original Arabic except the Qur'an memorization classes. When they provided examples of sayings of Prophet Muhammad, they would do this with Turkish translation. Thus, their use of Islamic jargon and Arabic buzzwords was minimal compared to AIM and FCM. In Turkish, there are some Arabic origin words that have been widely used, such as *inshallah* and *mashallah*. These words are religious in nature, but even secular people use it in their daily language. AIM and FCM teachers used more such codewords in addition to the two listed above. Using Islamic phrases allowed them to manifest their Islamic identity through language—using it to engage in identity construction (Azmi et al. 2021).

AIM focused on a Muslim identity and some of their curriculum, particularly that geared toward middle schoolers, was *dawah* (invitation to Islam) oriented. They instilled in students to be proud of their Muslim identities. They provided them tips how to tackle certain issues on a daily basis. Although they mentioned some of the oft-repeated theological errors about Christianity and Judaism, they reminded students to be respectful of other religions, but at the same time, to be aware of the spiritual burden they carry in terms of inviting their non-Muslim friends to Islam with the *dawah* mindset, which was mostly absent in other weekend schools

FCM strived to raise Muslim-Americans, whose Muslim identity coexists with their American identity. To this end, they used a “cool Islam” image to cater to youth—showcasing their “cool” teachers with a sense of humor and an awareness of American culture. They also emphasized Muslim pride in the public space more than the *dawah* itself, although they did not completely ignore the latter.

TCC’s weekend school efforts were oriented towards the construction of a Turkish-Muslim identity, rather than a Muslim-American one. Children negotiated with this effort by displaying their Americanness through cultural practices. As we will see in the following chapter, being socialized with other Turkish children was equally important to learn about Islam. TCC’s parents, hence, looked for ethnic socialization as much as a religious one. Being cognizant of this demand, TCC includes Turkish classes and elements of Turkish culture in their curriculum. Teaching Islam in Turkish was perceived as a *sine qua non* by TCC’s administrators.

The Islamic education at TCC was reward-based; that is, students were rewarded if they practiced some religious rituals or engaged in good manners. Indeed, TCC had the most sophisticated reward system of the three schools, using every opportunity to

reward children, using them the most among possible approaches to the religious socialization process (see Frisk et al. 2018). From monetary rewards to food items, TCC utilized a wide range of rewards. Fulfilling rituals such as daily prayers or Ramadan fasting, as well as displaying good character traits, ended up with different sorts of incentives for students. TCC also featured various classroom-specific rewards, as small as stickers. Despite this extensive rewards system at TCC, as we will see in a following chapter, not all parents agreed with it.

As for FCM, they had their own incentives in the form of small rewards like candies and certain privileges. These small rewards were used in classroom settings rather than setting a goal and reaching it as practiced by TCC. In contrast, AIM did not provide any rewards except for words of praise and encouragement.

Students at FCM seemed to have found teachers more relatable thanks to their age and familiarity with American culture. The students were more attentive and active, on average, compared to those at AIM and TCC. While it can be argued that AIM students were also attentive, their attention was coming from the fact that teachers were acting more like authority figures. As a result, despite the degree of attention students at AIM paid, they asked very few difficult questions or made almost no controversial comments. FCM teachers clearly had more of a sense of humor than the ones at AIM or TCC. Having a “cool teacher” image helped the popularity of FCM, who also hired young assistant or substitute teachers to help with the crowded student population. The classroom management styles of these teachers were also different. At AIM, teachers acted as the ultimate authority figures. They asked questions, but they rarely created opportunities for children to ask difficult questions. At TCC, teachers had a softer stance and as a result, students asked plenty of questions. At the same time, they abused the

lack of authority and language barrier of the teachers to act out, causing the teachers to have a hard time in classroom management. FCM teachers were dynamic, and they allowed students to express themselves in the classroom. They had a healthy balance between classroom management and student activity.

These differences among the three weekend schools, despite the similarities in main Islamic theology (all schools belong to mainstream Sunni Islam) are intriguing. To begin with, there was no single Muslim identity instilled at these three weekend schools. Those different identities are tied up in the lived experiences – how people use language, how they foster positive behavior (rewards / rituals), and how they navigate homeland / host cultures. Their Islamic understanding is also reflected to their class contents. For example, at AIM, being *dawah* oriented affects how they teach the Islamic material. By extension, TCC's "Light Islam" approach results in a curriculum designed to teach only the basics of faith without much complexity.

Taking a snapshot of the religious socialization process during the weekend school hours, which was four hours a week in each school, would not be enough to analyze the breadth of the religious socialization process. Children are exposed to more consistent, albeit looser, religious socialization at home in a larger period of time. In order to study this, I had to get the perspective of parents, who arguably are the first and the most influential actors of religious socialization. Parents' motivations to provide religious education or to send their children to a weekend school, the methods they utilized in their education, their parenting styles, backgrounds, and worldviews provide another important vantage on the religious socialization process. In Chapter Two, I focus on these parents—themselves being influential actors in the religious socialization process. In particular, I turn to parents who are members of the Movement, further

fleshing out the insights gained in this chapter from studying the weekend school of the Turkish Cultural Center.

Table 3: Distinctive Features of All Three Muslim Weekend Schools

	AIM	FCM	TCC
Type of Islam Instilled	Traditional	Cool	Light
Language Classes	Arabic	Arabic	Turkish
Use of Islamic Jargon and Buzzwords	Heavy	Heavy	Light
Type of identity	Muslim	Muslim-American	Turkish-Muslim
Use of Rewards	None; only verbal encouragement	Little; mostly candies and some privileges	Extensive and sophisticated
Classroom Management Style	Authoritative	Little; mostly candies and some privileges Democratic	Semi-democratic

CHAPTER TWO
THE MAKING OF A MUSLIM-TURKISH-AMERICAN:
RELIGIOUS SOCIALIZATION IN GÜLEN MOVEMENT-AFFILIATED
TURKISH FAMILIES

Introduction

We have seen, in the previous pages, that religious socialization is an ongoing process rather than a one-time occurrence. In contrast, immigration can be a groundbreaking and theologizing experience (Warner 2000) that causes dramatic and abrupt change in the lives of immigrants. During that experience, immigrants may often redefine their own identities, as they acclimate to new surroundings (Chai 1998; Killian and Johnson 2006; Trepper and Tung 2013). These changes in identities can occur gradually or dramatically, however. Religious conversion (i.e., seeking a new denomination or faith) as well as augmenting or deepening their already-established religious identities and practices can also be common among immigrants (Cherry et al. 2018; Madsen 2009). Indeed, becoming more religious is one way that immigrants can become “American” (Foner and Alba 2008).

Parents can focus particularly on religious socialization when, as immigrants, they are concerned about the (lack of) Muslim identity of their children. Interestingly enough, parents who may not have been religious in their homeland sometimes can become more religious once they immigrate, which is shown by a growing literature on immigrant religiosity (Phalet and Schönplflug 2001; Voas and Fleischmann 2012). As Hirschman (2004:1228) states, “For immigrants who are separated from their

homeland and from many relatives, religious membership offers a refuge in the sense that it creates a sense of belonging and participation.”

Portes and Zhou (1993) have argued that, when immigrants come to a new country, they either go through downward assimilation, straight line assimilation, or selective acculturation, which means that immigrants retain some aspects of their heritage and culture of origin while also adopting (many) aspects of the mainstream culture found in their new locale. However, Lacy (2004) offers an alternative to the third pattern described by Portes and Zhou. She argues that some middle-class African Americans “strategically assimilate”—not only deliberately retaining aspects of black culture and strategically dealing with key aspects of mainstream white culture, but also moving readily between black and white worlds. For example, some middle-class African Americans choose to live in white neighborhoods to prepare their children for racism and the white world, and they send their children to historically-white colleges to prepare them for professional work (which often overlaps with the white world). These same parents, however, still continue their connection to black culture, and they pass it on to their children through such organizations as Jack and Jill. Yet, some other middle-class African Americans prefer to live in black neighborhoods, so as to protect their children from racism and immerse them in black culture. Applying Lacy’s arguments to immigrant settings, Tatum and Browne (2019) have argued that middle-class immigrants use their bicultural knowledge (i.e., the ability to move between two worlds) as something that gives them a status advantage over their middle-class white counterparts, while at the same time, they also transmit their bi-cultural capital to their children.

Of course, other factors can shape how parents transmit knowledge and identity to their children. For example, Lareau (2002) argues that the socialization of children is shaped by class background. Middle and upper middle class employ a “concerted cultivation” approach (e.g., highly structured time and activities) that foster a sense of entitlement, while the working class employ a “natural growth” approach (e.g., kids structure their own playtime) that also fosters a sense of constraint when they encounter rules and authorities. These two approaches lead to different socialization trajectories, with the middle and upper class children especially well-prepared for the world of professionals.

I expect that Turkish immigrants affiliated with the Gülen Movement (described in Chapter One), when socializing their children into Islam, will pragmatically employ approaches similar to some of those described by Lacy (2004), Tatum and Browne (2019), and Lareau (2002). Those that I interviewed all live in the white suburbs, preferring not to form their own enclaves, but they still keep vibrant ties with the larger Turkish community and the Gülen Movement—which is akin to African Americans in white neighborhoods who keep their cultural connection through such cultural organizations as Jack and Jill organizations (Lacy 2004). I expect that in line with the studies of Lacy (2004) and Tatum and Browne (2019), these Turkish immigrants will socialize and prepare their children for the “Muslim world” and the “American world,” with the Muslim world particularly valued by them. Hence, these parents retain and celebrate dress, food, and rituals associated with the Gülen Movement, in particular, and with Islam, in general. Based on my pilot observations with the Gülen community, I also expect them partially to apply Lareau’s (2002) concerted cultivation / natural growth approaches to religious socialization process. Turkish parents seem to display

conscious effort when it comes to providing Islamic education to their children. The practices of families range from sending their children to weekend school to hiring special tutors for their Qur'an training and organizing special events for their children where they socialize their children with their peers and simultaneously engage in some Islamic education (more in keeping with concerted cultivation). Meanwhile, some parents do not engage in any such efforts, expecting their children to learn Islam by following the practices and examples of their parents, relatives (if any in America), siblings, and friends (more in keeping with natural growth).

Families Affiliated with the Gülen Movement

While all the interviews I conducted were with people affiliated with the Gülen Movement (GM), two salient categories (based on my initial rapport and subsequent observations and interviews) revealed themselves in this dissertation study: "The Oldcomers" and "The Newcomers." Although I do not have exact figures, roughly half of the Movement-affiliated people arrived in town after the 2016 coup attempt. Therefore, 2016 appears to be a good cut-point to differentiate between oldcomers and newcomers. I expect the religious socialization processes of the children of oldcomers and newcomers will be different.

It should be noted that the Movement members have disagreements about certain issues—including the Movement's role in the coup attempt, its reorganization in the American context, and how religious education should be provided to the second generation. Newly-arrived immigrants usually emphasize their native language (Rumbaut and Massey 2013). Thus, it would not be unusual to find that newcomers emphasize Turkish as the language of instruction, whereas for oldcomers, providing

religious education in English is of utmost importance. Newcomers could also be more suspicious of American culture and, therefore, not very willing to integrate into American society—as well as displaying the features of what Barzegar (2011: 536) calls the “Homeland Homesick” approach, in which people try to replicate the practices of their homeland as much as possible. This same approach seems to be valid for AIM in general (see Chapter One). In a Homeland Homesick community, “religious instruction and community programming [...] take place in a homeland language and that language instruction for children is typically a top priority for the group” (Barzegar 2011: 535).

Situating the Respondents

In terms of physical appearances, the women and men interviewees share commonalities with each other. For example, except for one respondent, all the female respondents wear hijab, although the age at which they began doing so varies. Some of the women wear pants, some wear skirts only, and some mix things up. Of course, none of them wear a skirt that stops above the knee. Actually, most of the skirts that the women wear are at ankle-level. For those that do wear pants, they make sure to also wear a long tunic, similar to an Indian *kameez*, that covers their hips. Their headscarves are colorful, and while made of different textures, are all similar in style. As Karademir-Hazır (2014:7) aptly notes, “[W]omen’s sartorial and corporeal styles have been strong signifiers in Turkey.” One can tell one’s worldview and ideology in Turkey by looking at their clothing.

As for the male respondents, they do not have a beard, but a few of them have a mustache. I have noticed that there was a correlation between adopting a traditional Islamic approach and growing a mustache. When I asked respondents whether my

hunch about this correlation was true or not, some said they imitated Fethullah Gülen, who has no beard but a mustache. Some of them pointed out that, rather than imitating him, they took his advice to grow a mustache. It is interesting that Nursi, the predecessor and spiritual mentor of Gülen, also had no beard but did have a mustache. When I pressed further about this no-beard style, the men respondents told me that they did not want to look like the stereotypical Muslim image popular in the West. “That ‘angry Muslim’ image has a couple of characteristics,” Murat noted. “They have a long beard, they wear traditional outfits, and they look angry. I really dislike that image because it is the same image that is associated violence in the Western media. I personally don’t like mustaches either, and I won’t grow one just because Gülen said so.”

One respondent with a mustache jokingly told me that it is the sign of being a man. Here, we see that the Movement seems to have tried to instill a universal image among its followers. Murat narrated a detailed summary of this image. “Twenty years ago, most of the Movement members were like this. They would grow a mustache with no beard, they would always wear slacks or pants, but would never wear jeans because, you know, jeans are usually tight fit and the Movement members did not want to reveal their body lines due to their piety. They would mostly wear shirts and would not tuck their shirts in, again for the very same reason, not revealing the body lines. So, basically, they would all look like each other.”

I relayed Murat's stereotypical description to other Movement members and they all confirmed it. Actually, some Movement members, albeit in minority, still look like this stereotypical description. I was also told that the Movement members used to follow a non-written rule within the Movement. I asked Murat whether he complied with that rule. “Yes, sometimes, but not a lot. I don’t like when someone tells me what to do or

what to wear. I always wore jeans even when I donned slacks occasionally. I now realized that this type of uniform outfit could turn people into uniform thinking. But again, to be honest, nobody forced me to wear certain clothing.”

All the interviewees, both men and women, pray at least a couple of times a day, with most doing so the standard five times. They also attend Friday prayers every week, except for women because I observed that Turkish women did not attend Friday prayer as much as men do. When I asked about this, one respondent said, “It is a tradition that we inherited from Turkey. You know, in Islam, Friday prayer is optional for women. That is why, very few of them come to the center. If they have a little child, they don’t want to drag them to the center with themselves.” While this response reflects a common cultural tradition in Turkey, it should be noted that Muslim women’s mosque attendance rates are considerably higher than the ones in their homelands because Muslim women take more leadership roles in America, and they see attendance as resistance to male dominant Muslim culture (Bano and Kalmbach 2011; Ozyurt 2010).

As long as they do not have other commitments that would prevent them from going to the mosque, such as work, men attend the Friday prayers. For example, one respondent teaches on Friday afternoons, missing the Friday prayer when he has a class. Male respondents do not necessarily prefer the Turkish cultural center for prayer at all times; they often choose a location convenient to their home or business. But they exclusively prefer the Turkish Cultural Center for the Eid prayers because it is where they get to see their friends; where they socialize, and where they make sure that their children share the Eid spirit as part of Turkish culture. Both men and women also regularly fast in Ramadan. Some of them read religious books, mostly books of Fethullah Gülen or Said Nursi on a regular basis.

The respondents I interviewed belong to the middle and upper-middle class. They all live in the suburbs of a city in which the average income level is more than \$80,000 (U. S. Census Bureau 2010). They work in sectors ranging from education to information technology (IT), and several respondents have their own small businesses devoted to such endeavors as transportation or kitchen cabinet making. Work in the IT industry has become an intriguing development within the Turkish community. Since there has been a recent surge of demand in the industry, many members of the Movement have chosen IT as a career, despite initially not having any background in that area. Indeed, more than a quarter of the women I interviewed either have found an IT-related job or they have been taking classes to prepare for such work—classes usually last about six months.

The interview respondents for this study come from divergent backgrounds, not in terms of social class, but in terms of the religiosity of their own parents and grandparents. One group of respondents came from very religious families. Such religious families generally had connections to certain religious communities or Sufi groups, which provided a grounding for their faith. In the absence of such connections, the religiosity of parents often stemmed from a theological profession, such as being an imam or a religious studies teacher at a public school. If there was no theological education, then the respondent's father or one of the grandfathers was an autodidact who improved themselves by reading various Islamic sources on their own. A few of the respondents in this group reported that they were born into the Gülen Movement, meaning their parents were the members; in another few cases, some respondents' maternal or paternal uncles were part of the Movement. Interestingly enough, respondents in this group with connections to certain religious communities

nonetheless obtained more religious knowledge from their families or close relatives than the community itself.

In contrast, another group—at least half of the respondents I interviewed—described their parents as “Anatolian Muslim,” or a classic example of “Anatolian Islam.” When I asked them what they meant by either term, each respondent came up with their own definition—providing various (and oftentimes unique) attributes and examples that they associated with the term. Yet, a shared meaning of sorts still emerged from this array of definitions, attributes, and examples: *Anatolian Muslims* usually experiences religion at the cultural level rather than the spiritual level, but such people are not a complete strangers to religious rituals and practices. Even if they never or partly observe Islamic rituals and requirements, they are still respectful of religion. This respect is based upon cultural traditions—such as showing deference to the Qur’an by keeping it at a high place at home and by displaying utmost regard for the *adhan* (the call to prayer) while it is being chanted. “My mom used to tell us to cover our hair when *adhan* (call to prayer) is recited,” Irmak recalled. Having no theological basis, this practice reflects a tradition that includes being respectful to God through some cultural rituals. Some cultural practices are treated like a religious ritual, or they are taken so seriously that people perceive it to be a religious *obligation*. For example, people are usually extra respectful of breadcrumbs because bread is traditionally and frequently consumed in a Turkish household; thus, people try not to waste even the smallest crumbs. Yet that practice gives way to religious obligation when children are taught that they should never step on breadcrumbs because to do so is a sin.

Each respondent in this second group provided their own examples of Anatolian Islam, which included a wide range of folk rituals as part of *folk Islam*. According to

Zafer, in this type of Islam, people tell parables from the traditional sources, but they rarely practice the lessons in their own lives. Women are still mostly covered, not out of piety, but rather out of complying with cultural traditions. Unlike *115urban*, the urban version of headscarf, the rural headscarf in Anatolian Islam does not symbolize any religious movement or political Islam. Even the covering style is different between the two. In the former, the urban version, the head is covered strictly without revealing any hair, whereas in the latter, the headscarf covers the head loosely, by which one can see some hair.

One of the most common cultural practices in Anatolian Islam is to organize a *mevlüt* on the occasion of an important life event such as birth, death, or marriage. *Mevlüt* is actually the name of a literary work by Süleyman Çelebi, a Turkish poet, to praise Prophet Muhammad. It is therefore not something that arose within the original Islam. All respondents are familiar with *mevlüt*, and they have at least joined one. Melih, for example, said he was raised in this *mevlüt* culture. “We would organize a *mevlüt* when somebody purchased a new house so that the house would bring blessings to the owner,” he remembered.

All this being said, if I were to situate Anatolian Muslims on a spectrum of religiosity, they would be closer to the religious side than to the secular. The majority of Anatolian Muslims live in rural areas or small towns, although they might have moved to a bigger city at some point in their lives. Interestingly enough, the respondents who come from an urban background rarely described their parents as Anatolian Muslims, unless they immigrated from a small town or village.

A third group among the interviewees, in addition to the religious people and *Anatolian Muslims*, can be called the “seculars.” If their parents have never practiced

Islamic rituals, the respondents defined them as either *secular* or *leftist*. There was no atheist among the parents or the grandparents of the respondents, but most of these seculars do not pray regularly or at all. Similar to some Christians who go to church only on Christmas, there are some Muslims who only attend the Eid prayers, which happen twice a year. The respondents noted that some of these secular or leftist parents have turned to religion when they aged. A few respondents reported that their father used to drink or still drinks alcohol which is forbidden in Islam.

In terms of religious education, the most common theme with all of the respondents was the Qur'an classes they attended during summer holidays. In most parts of Turkey, when summer begins, many parents send their children to neighborhood mosques, where they learn how to read the Qur'an. This practice is generally the first outsourcing method of traditional Turkish families that want to provide religious education to their children. The overwhelming majority of the respondents mentioned that their parents sent them to the nearest mosque in their neighborhood during summer holiday. More than half of the respondents were sent to these Qur'an classes a few years in a row. "By the time I learned how to read the Qur'an, the summer holiday would be over. So, we didn't have much opportunity to practice what we had learned during the summer and eventually I'd forget most of the Arabic letters. That is why my parents would send me again the next summer. This cycle would repeat every year throughout the elementary school years and we would begin from scratch each time," Levent recalled.

We can see this practice as the manifestation of *Anatolian Islam* because parents simply wanted to continue this cultural tradition by outsourcing Islamic education. Besides, most *Anatolian Muslim* parents did not have much Islamic knowledge; thus, it

was easy for them to send someone to the neighborhood mosque at a walking distance. Also, spending almost half a day, from morning to noon, at the mosque would keep children busy and give mothers, most of whom were housewives inundated with household chores, some relief. Yet very few things were taught in those classes. From my own experience, when my family sent me to such a class as a third grader, classes would touch on only the most basic information about Islam, like the pillars of faith. The respondents who were sent to such classes confirmed my own experience. “I used to go there during the weekdays and we had like four hours of class and the last hour was about the things that we needed to know about our faith. But they taught so basic knowledge that I already knew the material,” Arda remembered.

In Turkey, it is common knowledge that, in general, people do not have a reading habit. That is reflected in the respondents' lives, as well. Except for a couple of respondents, all of them reported the absence of reading habits by and with their parents. “My parents never read a book to me. This affected my current situation. I don't like reading,” Zeren said. Only a handful of interviewees' parents would read an Islamic book to their children. In addition to the general lack of reading habits, there used to be not many Islamic children's books available in Turkish market when our respondents were children (Saktanber 1991). That is why it came as no surprise that most respondents learned their religion through oral culture rather than written culture—such as spoken religious stories, parables, tales. When their parents were reading books, these books were mostly intended for adults. “My grandfather found some books about the Companions of Prophet Muhammad and he would read from these books,” Cemile said. This kind of childhood imagery is salient in the mind of the respondents. Fulya talked about how her mother taught her Islam through games and songs. Fulya's

background story is intriguing because her father was socialist with no ties to religion, whereas her mother was religious. So, her religious education came from her mother. This ideological divide revealed itself more when Fulya decided to cover her head. She remembers how upset her father became after this decision.

Having a religious family or not, most respondents mentioned the existence of someone who served as an inspiration for them. They generally mentioned someone who was spiritually influential either because of the good character traits or the piety they displayed. This influential person could be a teacher, a female or male older sibling, an uncle, one of the parents, or grandparents. In Zafer's case, for example, it was the religious studies teacher in middle school. "He seemed to be a very decent and calm person and his demeanor left a lasting impact on me." At least half of the respondents mentioned someone who led by example.

In Turkey, unlike the United States, there is no private Islamic school or religious school because all schools, public or private, need to follow the same secular curriculum. But there is a kind of government-owned school called *imam hatip*, a vocational public school, where students are trained as preachers and/or imams or prepared for higher education (Çakır et al. 2004). But even *imam-hatip* schools follow the same secular curricula, but they teach classes that are related to Arabic, Qur'an, and Islamic theology on top of the regular secular classes.

Several respondents, mostly women, reported that their parents sent them to *imam hatip schools*. Indeed, very few of the female students who attended these schools would go on to become a preacher, and they were not allowed to become an imam. But in my sample, it was the women who attended these schools, and not the men, because of several reasons. First, some parents would not send their daughters to *any* school if

they did not attend an *imam hatip school*. Second, these schools teach Qur'an, Arabic, and Islamic history. Third, the education at these schools has not been coed—allowing some families to send their daughters without the mingling of boys and girls. Fourth, female students are supposed to wear a headscarf in the classroom because they recite the Qur'an. In Turkey, the headscarf issue was a hot topic in the mid 1990s because of the bans brought by the secular establishment in the country against female students in high schools and universities. *Imam-hatip schools* served like a safe haven for female students because they were only allowed to wear headscarves in this type of school. Despite the presence of *imam hatip schools*, in some conservative families, girls were not sent to school in earlier times, but some parents eventually changed their minds. “My girl cousin was the first one in the family to go to college,” Cemile said, relaying the story of her maternal grandfather who was reluctant to send his daughters to school. Again, this points to a trauma of the religious people in the earlier years of the republic. When madrasas were shut down, the secular public schools were seen as places where religion was attacked, where modern outfits were encouraged, and where mingling of the sexes was normalized (Zürcher 2004). Associating secular public schools with anti-religious sentiments caused some allergy towards these schools among the conservative population.

Several respondents attended private schools, mostly middle and high school, affiliated with the Movement. Similar to *imam hatips*, the Movement's private schools and dormitories served as a safe haven for female students because families who were reluctant to send their daughters to big cities for high school or college education trusted the schools and dormitories of the Movement. In some of these schools, education was not coed at the high school level although the Movement changed its policy later. In fact,

many other religious groups in Turkey emulated Movement's practice and opened their private schools and dormitories.

Since most mothers of the respondents were housewives, they mostly learned the rituals from these mothers. "My religious education comes from my mother. But I learned human relations, honesty, and other moral principles from my father," said Irmak. Children whose fathers were small business owners, or craftsmen saw their fathers in action. Several respondents reported that they hung out with their fathers in their store or shop to learn about the business in summer holidays. There, they witnessed how their fathers were interacting with customers, suppliers, and authorities.

Most of the respondents had their first daily prayer experience in elementary school, but it was not until high school and beyond that they started praying regularly, with some exceptions of middle school experience. When I asked about what they would remember related to religion from their childhood, most of them told me some memories associated with daily prayers. "I remember my grandfather praying next to a creek," said Sacit. Coming from a family where the daily prayers were attached a special importance, Miran recalls this sentence from his father who in a half-serious tone told him: "If you don't do your daily prayers, I will change your birth certificate. I don't want a child who doesn't pray." Some respondents like Cansel, in their childhood, imitated their older sisters who prayed. Respondents coming from secular families, in contrast, were influenced by a religious relative if their own parents were not praying. "My aunt used to visit us and her early wake ups for the morning prayer meant a lot to me. Since nobody would wake up for the morning prayer, I would always get excited by this unique experience," noted Cemile.

Joining the Gülen Movement (GM)

Among my respondents, less than 10 percent of the respondents were born into the Gülen Movement, which means they joined the Movement at a later point in their life. Their journey with the Movement started with frequenting the GM-affiliated houses (called *houses of light*) in middle or high school. Most respondents reported that they were not regularly praying prior to their participation in the Movement.

Respondents who already came from religious families or had existing ties with other religious communities reported that, when they first joined the Movement, their parents were happy about it or at least they did not resist this decision. Gonca said that her family welcomed this news with relief because they knew they could trust the Movement. Some of these respondents, who had relatives previously involved in the Movement, mentioned that these relatives had already been advertising the Movement and Fethullah Gülen.

The Gülen Movement, particularly in the 1980s and 1990s, followed an aggressive expansion policy by recruiting middle school and high school students to the Movement, which generally targeted poor but bright students (Balci 2014). “I was a bright student and they were interested in me,” said Levent. When I asked him how they found him, he said, “The Movement generally has one member in each classroom, or at least several members in a school. Also, in local colleges and universities, college students who were a member of the Movement were usually assigned to middle or high school students. They knew which student was bright and they tried to bring these students to their houses.” I was curious what they were doing in these houses, so I inquired further. Levent replied, “I think everyone’s experience might have been different, but they would help us with our homework, playing video games, praying, etc.

They first usually invite you there for a free tutoring opportunity. Who doesn't want free tutoring, right? Then they teach you about the principles of the Movement.”

Quickly rising in ranks within the Movement has been a recurring theme among the interview respondents. “I started staying at the Movement’s dormitories when I was in college. Then I became an assistant *ev ablası*,” said Irmak. Literally meaning “elder sister of the house,” this term (*ev ablası*) refers to the leader in charge inside a Movement-affiliated house. Each *ev ablası* has an assistant that would help her with the smooth functioning of the house. Sometimes an *ev ablası* can become a *belletmen* in Movement-affiliated dormitories. While the term *belletmen* literally means “teacher aide,” there is no teacher in these dormitories in the classic sense. *Belletmen* is responsible for a group of people in a dormitory and each dormitory might have several *belletmens* depending on the size of the residence. A *belletmen* typically serves as a spiritual guide, but people under their supervision may also come to them with any other problems that they might have. Thus, rising in ranks would require spiritual development on the part of such a person.

The Gülen Movement does not describe itself as a religious movement (Alliance for Shared Values n.d.), but respondents stated that religion takes up crucial space in their lives. Yet, interestingly, when the Movement-affiliated houses became venues of socialization, they were not always a place for religious socialization. “It was more like hanging out with friends and getting socialized with them,” recalls Miran. “We would play soccer, basketball, and go to a picnic at least once a month.” When I inquired what else they were doing spiritually, most respondents reported similar rituals and activities. “We would listen to the cassettes of Fethullah Gülen or watch his videos where he would preach in the mosque or engage in a religious conversation with his friends or students

in his close circle,” Caner said. Listening to Gülen’s sermons and conversations provided moral and religious infrastructure to the respondents. They obtained spiritual awareness through these cassettes. This phenomenon is similar to the listening practices of Egyptian people who gained spirituality and morality through such cassettes in the 1980s (Hirschkind 2009). “In addition to cassettes, we would fast on Mondays and Thursdays, emulating the practice of Prophet Muhammad,” Edis recalled.

The majority of the respondents met their future spouse through a common friend in the Movement. According to Soner, there are people in the Movement who are tasked with matchmaking, but the interview respondents did not mention receiving the help of matchmaker in finding their spouse. In most cases, the couple met each other through a common friend, but they also emphasized that they did not date in the Western sense of the word. In Islam, dating has some strict rules, such as no premarital sex or even not being alone in a room. Therefore, they said they did not know much about their future spouse until marriage. Yet, the interviewees mostly did not complain about that.

Religious Socialization at Home: The Key Actors

Religious socialization within the family is a large and potentially sprawling topic. Hence, during the interviews, I set out to find the answers to three main questions regarding religious socialization. First, I asked respondents how they provide religious education to their children. Second, I inquired about the extent to which they outsource this education, as well as what they are doing to this end. Third, I asked questions regarding issues surrounding this socialization process, as well as its connection to the Movement, the larger American society, and their own spirituality. While the interviews

revealed no hard-and-fast uniformity among the respondents, as each family has its own dynamics, they do yield some general patterns regarding the religious socialization process occurring in these families.

In general, women are more active in early years of their children's religious socialization. Among the women I interviewed, almost two thirds are currently employed, but very few of them were employed when they first arrived in the United States (due to visa issues or to language barrier). Moreover, some of them gave birth to their first or second child soon after their arrival in the United States, further complicating their path to employment. Therefore, women initially functioned as the providers of religious education. As the children aged, fathers also start to take on some responsibilities and roles in this religious education. In a couple of families, the fathers are currently more active than the mothers, thanks to their particular skills—such as possessing advanced religious knowledge or being able to recite the Qur'an in a proficient manner. Mothers want to make sure their children read the Qur'an properly, and if the father has prior theological training, they are willing to leave this duty to their husbands.

While we see a gendered division of labor in religious socialization, some respondents, particularly women, are not completely satisfied with it. Oyku, as an example, wants her husband to be more involved with the religious education of their children. "I am expecting him to take some of the burden off of my shoulders," she said. Fulya and Cansel share the same sentiment, stating that the majority of religious education is on their shoulders. When I asked about what kind of things that they do in this religious education, they gave me a similar list that includes reading religious storybooks to their children, tutoring the children about the Qur'an, reminding children

about their prayers, giving them a ride to weekend school, and following up on their children's progress at the school. Typically using the excuse of being too busy themselves to help, the men bashfully agreed with the extensive lists detailed by the women.

The involvement of the father varies in different families. In some families, they seem to have been more involved with their first child, but it gradually diminishes with the subsequent child(ren). Yet sometimes, their involvement increases as their children grow up. "Initially, children are dependent on their mother, but as they grow up, they become more dependent on their father," said one respondent who has three boys. It is understandable for a mother to say this for their sons, but in some families, fathers still continue to carve out a substantial role even when they have girls. Necla, for example, said her daughter does not approach her if she has a question about religion, instead she consults with her father. Nevertheless, in most Turkish families I interviewed, women were the primary provider of religious education in earlier years.

As bi-directionality would suggest, children are also key actors in religious socialization. Indeed, older siblings often set the tone for the rest of their siblings. For example, in families with two or more girls, if the oldest daughter wears a hijab, the other girls may follow suit, making the life easier for her parents. This is what happened with Gonca's family. "Our oldest daughter kind of hurried to wear a hijab. When we asked her why she was in such a hurry, she said, "I heard that donning a hijab in later years becomes more difficult. So, I decided to have it now while I am still willing." As a result, her younger sisters followed her lead, and they all started wearing hijab. In some families, older children act like the driving force of spirituality at home, inspiring even their parents. "Our oldest daughter (who goes to college) wakes us up for the *tahajjud*

(optional midnight prayer). We have become *tahajjud* buddies these days. We never forced her to do this.”

Immigration, however, has complicated the involvement of other actors. In Turkey, immediate and extended relatives are an important part of the religious socialization process. Especially in rural areas, sending one’s parents to a nursing home is usually frowned upon; therefore, it is not uncommon to have grandparents at home. Those grandparents, even if they did not observe religion in their youth, become more religious once they get older (which is common in Turkey). In such a large family, children might see their grandparents praying on a daily basis, something contributing to the process. Yet, the situation is different in the United States. Many respondents complained about the fact that they do not have any relatives here. “Children do not see any grandmother, grandfather, uncle, aunt, etc. They lack this luxury here. I think this stunts their spiritual development. Maybe we need to act like uncles and aunts to our friends’ children,” Akif said.

This sentiment had been shared by many other respondents, and it spurred efforts to compensate for missing relatives with other connections. Thus, around three years ago, they started WhatsApp groups. For each grade level, parents would join its relevant group. For example, in a third grade WhatsApp group, parents who had children that went to that grade level formed a group and appointed a voluntary group leader. They formed separate groups for boys and girls. The goal was to bring children together for play dates, or to encourage families to visit each other so that each parent would function like an honorary aunt or uncle for the children whose real aunts and uncles are in Turkey. When I started my observations, these groups were already in effect, but the pandemic dramatically stopped this socialization effort. During the

pandemic, some families either did not visit any other family or they paid these visits with only a couple of families. In most cases, they hung out with their closest friends whom they trusted during the pandemic. In their decisions, families mostly chose a family whose children were from the same gender and age group.

Religious Education and Language

Whether or not they are able to provide it, almost all respondents believe that the necessity of religious education is part of their duty as parents. “I am the father of this child, not the owner. God entrusted her to me. So, I need to give her the proper religious and moral education. It is a duty and obligation on me,” Sezgin stated. Many parents shared a similar sentiment. Providing religious and moral education is perceived as a noble and sacred activity. Even when they are not able to properly do it, the majority of parents still agree that they need to be more proactive.

Based on Baumrind’s typology (Baumrind 1968, 1978), Turkish parents are mostly permissive in their socialization style. They have experienced that the authoritative or authoritarian styles do not work for children when it comes to religious education. “We grew up with noteworthy stories about how some famous people are staying away from religion,” Olcay said. He then told the story of an actor who went to a mosque but was reprimanded by an elderly mosque-goer. That actor never again went to a mosque and cooled towards religion. Regardless of the veracity of this story, Turkish families are well aware that they are not going to accomplish anything if they force their children to do something. That is why the most common theme I heard among these families is being a good role model for the child. While they engage in some encouragements and reminders, parents almost never force their children to pray or do

anything spiritual. The purpose is to be a good role model without imposing anything. “I never force my children to pray. I want them to start on their own volition. They see me pray. This is what matters,” commented Eylul.

Based on my overall observations on the community in various settings, I find that parents try to tread very lightly in order not to scare their kids. For example, when a family visits another one and if it is the prayer time, fathers call all children, who are usually busy playing with each other, to join them during the prayer. When the men start the prayer, the women would also join them at the back or in another room. But before doing that, they would give children one last call. There are very few times when children joined the prayer on their own initiative without somebody having to call them. Such calls and encouragement increase in number as a child gets older.

The encouragement of children about different rituals comes in several forms. One form of encouragement is to decrease the requirements of a ritual for the child, such as telling them partially to do the requirements. This practice is especially common for pre-school age children. For example, some families do not require their children to perform all the prayers. “We pray together as a family, but since she is five years old, we don’t ask her to have the required *wudu* (ritual ablution) for the prayer,” said Miran. By keeping certain rituals optional, families try to alleviate the burden of prayer in the early childhood years. But they also want to make sure that these light rituals are still performed under all conditions. “If our daughter has a playdate with a friend, we tell the host family that she needs to pray when the time comes. We even send them reminder text messages,” Miran adds. Several families reported that they prefer a gradual transition to prayer instead of a full head-start. They ask their children to pray one time during the first grade, two times during the second grade, and so on until the five-time

daily prayer is performed by the time they become fifth graders. In terms of the start age for prayer, following a hadith of Prophet Muhammad, families encourage their children to start praying when they are seven years old.

Another popular form of encouragement is to give rewards and incentives, something practiced extensively at TCC's weekend school (Chapter One). When Nezhir's daughter learned how to read the Qur'an, the family gifted her a new Qur'an. Gamze also gives her children various gifts, including cash prizes, for fasting and praying in Ramadan. "The level of gift changes depending on whether they fasted in full or partially," she explained. Many parents, particularly in Ramadan, give various gifts for fasting, displaying good behavior, or praying.

That said, not all parents are in favor of such incentives. "We don't give any reward to our child," Yonca commented. "We sometimes eat chocolate after we read the Qur'an, but we never present the chocolate as a reward." Ceyda, however, does things a little bit differently, giving rewards for intellectual activities instead of spiritual ones. "We reward children when they read a book, but we don't do the same when it comes to prayers. Our reward is to get permission to play a video game."

Being able to read the Qur'an for the first time is treated by Turkish families in a manner similar to how Catholic families treat their children's First Communion. To celebrate this event, some Turkish families throw a party, at home with other friends, or at the weekend school with their classmates. It is organized like a birthday party except, this time, guests receive some gifts from the family whose child learned how to read the Qur'an. I have been to a couple of these parties at my observation sites, including the weekend school, and there was once a cake in the shape of the Qur'an. Some families

choose weekend school as the location of such a party, while some families invite the best friends of their child and do it at home.

Another recurring form of encouragement used by the parents is “catering to the subconscious.” The term, commonly used among the respondents, implies that the families strive to instill religious consciousness either at an early age or through implicit methods. People in the Gülen movement generally believe that religious education should start at an early age, when the child’s mind is still pure like a blank slate. But this education should not be forced, intense, nor complicated. For example, some respondents reported they play a pre-recorded Qur’an clip so that children have exposure to it at an early age, even if they do not know the meaning or are unable to pronounce the words. Cansel, for example, plays some Qur’an recitation on YouTube for a couple of hours so that the kids gain some familiarity with its sound and melody. Families use audiovisual aids frequently. Audio is used more in early years, while visual aids enter the scene once the child becomes three or four years old. In line with the “catering to the subconscious,” Cansel said, “When my son was an infant, I would recite Chapter Ibrahim from the Qur’an to my son so he would have a great character.”

Just as they do in catering to the subconscious during their children’s early years, in the implicit catering during the children’s later years, families use certain media content. For instance, they play an Islamic song performed by a children’s choir or a singer. The songs are intentionally geared for children; therefore, they do not always have the preaching or serious tone. This is what Gonca and her husband Nusret did when their children were little. They would play all the songs on the CD when they were driving. “Sometimes, instead of the songs, Nusret would help them memorize the short chapters of the Qur’an,” Gonca remembers.

Children's religious stories are instrumental for the religious socialization of children (Budak 2019). Hearing religious stories and parables from his paternal uncle in his childhood, Sezgin retells stories to his daughter, sometimes making slight changes. Almost three out of four parents read a storybook to their children at some point in their childhood. They mostly read Turkish books. Parents admit that they do not have plenty of English Islamic books. Even if they do, instead of reading to their children, they let them read by themselves once they are at school age. Most parents are selective about the content of the books they read. Selin's daughter was scared of the content of the books about the life of certain prophets because of some wars. "She couldn't sleep that night; so, we decided not to read books with violent content," she said. Similarly, Fulya said they stopped reading Islamic children's books to her children after they saw some R-rated things like violence. As we have seen in Chapter One, the Turkish community displays extra sensitivity for the violent material.

To teach them Turkish culture, parents also select books from Turkish history. However, some parents, like Zafer, are particularly critical of these children's books. "Current Turkish story books contain sultans, kings, etc. and they are not super relatable to our children. They understand something through Harry Potter much more easily because the historical figures are distant for our children who are born and raised here in America." Fulya, on the other hand, complained about the lack of female historical characters in these books. Some parents, on the other hand, strive to make their children read books about Turkish history, particularly about the Ottoman Empire. The Sultans they choose generally consists of the ones that symbolize the heyday of the Ottomans. It is interesting that the Movement members are hesitant to read anything

violent in religious storybooks, but they are open to reading historical books that would contain battles, conquests, etc.

The disposition of the children themselves also shapes the religious education that they receive. For example, Olcay said their older child seems to be more receptive to religious education. “Our older son sometimes warns us if we are late for prayer. But his religious feelings are easy to manipulate. Once, I guess he must have listened to some old school preachers and he was telling us not to listen to any music. We feared that he would turn to radicalism. So, we decided to introduce him to more moderate preachers to soften his stance. This was another reason we sent him to homeschool in another state.” But their younger child is even having a hard time memorizing the shortest chapters in the Qur’an. “I think he is still a child. When we tell him to pray, he just does it because we say so. But we don’t want to force him all the time”

“Due to his nature and gender, we provided a different religious education to our son,” said Cemile. “He is different from his sisters. Actually, we tried different strategies in each child, but our daughters would do whatever we told them. This doesn’t work with our son. When I ask him to do some Qur’an memorization, he immediately rejects, delays, or avoids doing it. My husband and I have tight schedules; so, we don’t want to force him when he turns down our request.” Here, again, being busy and possessing a different disposition are the reasons behind the varied approaches.

Differences among siblings reveal themselves in their linguistic development, as well. Younger siblings in the Turkish families, even when they are of preschool age, tend to speak English. In their daily life, they observe English conversations between their older siblings; thus, they pick up the language quickly. Meanwhile, the older siblings almost always speak English to the younger ones. Moreover, in recent years, children as

young as two years of age are given a tablet and watch YouTube clips. That development is partly due to another one: More Turkish women in the Movement have recently been part of the workforce. If they work from home, they do not have much time to spend with their children, handing out a tablet or a cell phone to the youngest one(s), or if they go to work, leaving them at daycare. In both scenarios, the younger siblings are exposed to English frequently.

Yet the story is different with parents whose emotional attachment to Turkish stems from the idea that, if they are not able to speak Turkish, they will lose their national, ethnic, and eventually religious identity. Sometimes parents, then, aim for unrealistically lofty goals for their children's Turkish levels. One respondent told me that he would like his children to understand Turkish literary classics and even memorize some Turkish poems. Several other respondents shared the same goal. For example, Kerem makes his son, before bedtime, listen to some Turkish ebooks on YouTube—most of which last at least for a few hours. A less lofty level of fluency that other Turkish parents envision for their children is to understand Turkish religious texts. But this goal usually does not end happily for a few reasons. First, these religious texts are heavy with abstract concepts and vocabulary borrowed from Ottoman Turkish. Second, most Turkish religious scholars, including Fethullah Gülen, like using pompous words, also heavy in jargon. However, second-generation Turkish children have hard time understanding these types of words and the idea behind them. The linguistic divide in religious texts is furthered because the Gülen community usually does not use English religious sources if they are not the translated works of Fethullah Gülen or Said Nursi. Therefore, the majority of Movement members have never heard about some famous

American Muslim scholars—those dealing with religious complexities and make some spiritual impact on Muslim Americans in English rather than Turkish.

The young children and teenagers of these Turkish are not proficient and fluent enough in Turkish to engage in weighty philosophical and religious debates. Contrary to the wish of most Turkish parents, instead, the Turkish language is reserved for daily interactions, but the Gülen community in general does not seem to accept this hard fact. When they design a workshop for youth, Turkish still remains the medium most of the time. For instance, an announcement regarding a youth workshop on issues about *fiqh* (jurisprudence) came up. The instructor was going to present his material in Turkish. One respondent told me that this was nothing but chasing their own tail. He told me that, a few years ago, he had met a group of high school students eager to engage in a religious conversation. The group, he was told, had received their religious education almost exclusively in Turkish, yet they asked him questions about the very basics of Islamic faith. He thinks that this happened because the teenagers were not provided Islamic education in English.

Two reasons regarding the lack of English when teaching Islam came to the fore. First, Turkish is still seen as the *lingua sacra* (sacred language) of religious education. Arabic is only used when reciting the Qur'an or performing the daily prescribed prayers. Other than that, I did not see any effort by the Turkish parents or the weekend school to teach Arabic to their children. Qur'an recitations were exclusively used for memorization purposes; nor did they give the Turkish translations of the verses that students memorized. From reading a religious text to explaining a religious concept, parents, particularly the newcomers, use Turkish. Second, there are not enough qualified people who are fluent and knowledgeable enough about Islam in English. The

weekend school, for example, has always had a difficult time finding qualified teachers to teach in English.

This linguistic divide has led some of the Turkish parents to adapt when it comes to explaining religious issues. Some of them explain in Turkish and English, as long as their English is good enough to tackle theological words. “We explain religious issues sometimes in Turkish, sometimes in English. Of course, my Turkish is better, but their English is more fluent. I also want to make sure they are familiar with the Islamic terminology in English,” Ceyda explained. Albeit it a minority, several respondents explain religious issues exclusively in English. In Melih’s family, the instruction of language for Islam is English. “I sometimes add some Turkish to the mix,” says Melih. “I listen to non-Turkish Muslim preachers. For example, I have been listening to Numan Ali Khan recently.”

I find that, among the Turkish families in my study, the oldcomers especially attach extra importance to English when teaching Islam. Kerem says, “It is very important for them to learn Islam from an English native speaker.” Cansel admitted that they explain some religious issues in English because her children have a hard time understanding it in Turkish. Once the issues require the use of more complex words, children need English due to lack of academic Turkish repertoire. “Our daughter wants an explanation in English,” admits Zafer. When asked about Turkish or English preference, Nezih’s response was concise. “It should be the language of love first and foremost.” But he clarified his stance later on. “After middle school, Islam must be taught in English. Teenagers need to form their own peer group where they will be comfortable speaking English, but these gatherings should not be based on religious education. Parents need to be in the background.”

The oldcomers strongly believe that English, particularly after a certain age, should be the medium of instruction. “Our kids don’t have enough Turkish vocabulary about religious topics. Somebody told me, ‘How am I going to convey my emotions to my child?’ I think either he needs to learn English or his child needs to learn Turkish. I prefer the former because we live in the United States. But on the other hand, most of our resources are in Turkish,” commented Sezgin. When I checked some of the English resources Turkish parents use, they were mostly translations from Turkish. The translation quality was not necessarily top notch either. Furthermore, some of the examples used in the original text might not mean anything to children who are born and raised in America.

In contrast to the oldcomers, the majority of newcomer parents use Turkish when teaching Islam, especially when their children are in the pre-school years. “When the child is little, I want him to associate Islam with Turkishness,” said Seden. “The Movement literature covers both Islam and Turkishness,” added Tansel. While this was explicitly stated only by Seden, several respondents implicitly shared the same idea. Gonca, for example, talked about another dimension of equating Islam with Turkishness. “We once lived in a small town and there was no Turk other than us. There was a mosque, but I never thought about attending the mosque because it completely got out of my mind. When I finally stepped inside the mosque, I was amazed by the diversity.” Gonca’s interesting example reveals that, in the absence of Turks, some people do not even consider being part of the Islamic public space. “The Movement is still Turkish in spirit despite its transnational reach,” Murat commented. “Almost all decision-makers are Turkish although the Movement has also been doing interfaith dialogue activities for a long time.” In my observations, I also noticed that these decision

makers are generally middle-aged males. So, I asked Murat whether women and the youth are excluded. “I can’t say they are totally excluded, but they are heavily underrepresented.”

Such underrepresentation is complicated by issues of language. Murat goes on to criticize some of the efforts towards the Turkish language. “I know many people who want their children to have the same Turkish fluency as their parents. This is an unrealistic expectation. There is no way these children reach the Turkish proficiency level of their parents. Besides, most of the religious texts, particularly those of Nursi and Gülen, were written in Ottoman Turkish or contain advanced vocabulary of this register,” Murat commented. Irmak pointed out the tension between parents and the Movement officials regarding their approach to language. “Parents want this guidance to take place in English, whereas the local Movement officials demand Turkish.” When I asked a Movement official the underlying reason for their insistence on Turkish, he said, “Because families don’t or can’t encourage their kids to read Turkish books. If we don’t do it in our weekly gatherings with the kids, they won’t read it at home.”

Halal Food and Religious Socialization

One of the most important issues in every Movement-affiliated Turkish family is to follow a halal diet in the United States. *Halal* is an Arabic term meaning “permissible” or “lawful” (Wilson 2014). According to Regenstein et al. (2003: 111) “The halal dietary system determines which foods are lawful or permitted for Muslims. These laws are found in the Quran and in the Sunna, the practice of the Prophet Muhammad.” There are also non-halal foods or drinks that are called *haram*, meaning “forbidden.” But there might also be other items that can be *haram* if they are not prepared

according to halal standards. Bone and Verbeke (2008) state there are several standards, ranging from the animal's and slaughterer's condition to production and distribution issues. Families, therefore, want to make sure whatever they eat has halal ingredients. Even respondents that are less spiritual than others stated that they mostly observed a halal diet at home.

For the Turkish community, food is seen as part of protecting Turkish culture and Muslim identity. Interestingly, in addition to halal meat or other halal products, the food from the Turkish kitchen is seen as part of the halal diet. "When we first came to America, I wouldn't even purchase cereal for breakfasts. I was trying to make sure that our children were having the traditional Turkish breakfast because I saw cereal as the first step towards assimilation. One day, my children were eating cereal in our neighbor's home and they were crazy about it. I realized eating cereal didn't cause them to get assimilated; so, we started buying it for our family as well." This funny but revealing anecdote by Cemile reflects fear of assimilation and how any element of American culture has been perceived as a threat to Turkish culture in the eyes of some respondents. But at the same time, as we saw in Chapter One, just like the Turkish language is perceived as sacred, something to protect one's Muslim identity, in a similar vein, the Turkish kitchen was seen as the protector of the Turkish culture.

Interestingly, several families reported that they consume some non-halal meat if they go to a restaurant, but they never purchase a non-halal meat from a supermarket. Home is idealized like a sacred place and, therefore, home consumption is treated like a ritual, whereas restaurants are perceived as part of the profane. In this Durkheimian practice, home and everything associated with home are elevated to the sacred (Durkheim 2001 [1912]). An implicit social pressure regarding the purchase of halal

meat for household consumption exists. “I think even a piece of regular beef in Walmart should be permissible because we live in a Christian country, but we always purchase halal meat because of the social pressure,” Zeynel said. His statement reflects the perception of some of the other respondents that America is a Christian country. Yet, interestingly, other than Zeynel, almost nobody shared the same opinion. Most of the respondents are adamant about halal meat consumption. According to most Muslim scholars, a non-pork meat is not considered halal enough for consumption unless the animal is slaughtered according to Islamic rules. Thus, Turkish families never buy any beef or lamb from any supermarket unless it has halal certification on it.

The halal consumption issue is not without its gray areas. Some respondents have started trying some uncharted waters, leaving their strict halal consumption behind. Chick-fil-A has emerged at this point as an interesting in-between option for some Turkish families. The owner’s devout Christian beliefs seem to have permeated the company as all Chick-fil-A locations are closed on Sunday (Bhasin 2012). Because the Qur’an gives permission to eat an animal if it is slaughtered by a Christian or a Jew (Lever and Miele 2012), some parents treat Chick-fil-A as the symbol of the Christians mentioned in the Qur’an. Muslim parents extensively benefit from the kosher certification system (Schwartz 1993), but there is no specific Christian dietary system similar to Jewish kosher or Muslim halal. Thus, there is no Christian certification agency that would regulate such a dietary system. Chick-fil-A, thanks to the religious roots of its owner, seems to have filled this void for some Turkish families. Close to a quarter of parents I interviewed have been to a Chick-fil-A. Furthermore, Chick-fil-A functions like a transitional restaurant for families who want to navigate the other restaurants in the future. In the words of Olcay, “some rigid lines have recently been

blurred.” These blurry lines confused some of my respondents and put them in limbo. “I haven’t softened my stance on Chick-fil-A yet, but I’m still doing my research on it,” said Melih.

Some families are open to new tastes, but they still want to do it within Islamically permissible boundaries. “We once tried this burger place in...Mall after hearing that their beef was halal. But they were cooking all halal burgers with the non-halal things at the same place. So, we decided not to eat,” Melih said. Most families, due to the practice of cooking different meats in the same place, are hesitant to visit American restaurants because they assume that pork and other meat products are cooked in the same place. However, if they can, families investigate and do their own research. They openly ask the owner or the person behind the counter whether they cook the meat together or whether their meat is halal or not. A Turkish Instagram account called “Helalin Peşinde” (In Pursuit of Halal) has recently become popular within the Turkish community. This account investigates all controversial food items in a product and shares the results they found—which includes calling the manufacturers and asking about certain ingredients whether it contains animal products, alcohol, pork, etc. Respondents also told me they inform each other about the availability of halal meat in a supermarket. Recently, stores like Costco, Restaurant Depot, and Lidl have included halal meat in their selections. Still, the majority of Turkish families frequent Muslim-owned butchers, Turkish supermarkets, and Middle Eastern international markets where the chances of finding halal meat is almost guaranteed.

When it comes to dining, there is no single practice among the interviewed respondents. Each family tries to find its own solution based on their tastes and preferences. Starting from middle and high school years, children strive to impose their

own preferences on their parents who mentioned that their children are more open to new tastes than themselves. Zeynel's family has a broad range of selections. "We eat shrimp, fish, and we even try Thai, Korean, and Indian restaurants," he said. Sacit's children also try new restaurants as long as they are halal. Ece noted that her daughter likes trying new tastes like sushi.

Some families find unconventional solutions. One parent talked about a Little Caesars store whose owner was Muslim. "He makes sure they don't add any non-halal ingredients when we are there and they cook separately." Some families, on the other hand, make a distinction between the meals. "For dinner, we mostly go to a Turkish or another halal restaurant. But we go to IHOP, Panera Bread, and Dunkin for breakfast. Basically, we go anywhere for breakfast," Soner said. It is hard to find a steakhouse with halal meat, but one steakhouse with a partial halal menu is a popular destination among the respondents. Those who have heard and tried it for the first time immediately inform their closest friends. When I went to that restaurant with a couple of respondents, some of them only ordered the halal lamb, while some others ordered chicken and beef as well. Those who ordered the halal lamb told the waiter not to marinate the lamb with alcohol as it was a common practice there. None of the people in the group ordered pork. The meat experience revealed that there are two stages of halal consumption. In the first stage, there are some meats like pork that are not halal 100 percent. My respondents never consume this type of meat. In the second stage, there is controversy around certain permissible meat items such as chicken, beef, and lamb. They want to make sure these items are slaughtered according to halal or kosher standards. Some respondents, albeit a minority, eat any type of meat as long as they do not belong to the first stage.

When traveling, the respondent families still mostly look for a halal restaurant. If they are unable to find one, they go with the veggie options. Inexpensive restaurants like McDonalds are only frequented for their fries, not for their burgers. “When we first came to America, we were told that the tuna in Subway restaurants was permissible,” Arda noted. “This piece of information became so widespread that many Turkish families I knew only frequented Subways to eat tuna.”

In some families, halal consumption is equated with healthy consumption. “When we check the ingredients, we look whether there is any harmful ingredient rather than looking for a halal certificate,” says Nezih. Likewise, Erkin hates if a restaurant is halal but dirty. “We immediately leave the place if we find out that the restaurant doesn’t seem clean.” “Organic and hormone-free meat is more important than a halal one,” Yuksel noted. Dilara brought up the same issue. “We think organic food is important. Also, cleanliness in a restaurant matters. Something halal is not enough for us. It should be healthy, too. There are some halal marshmallows, but they are unhealthy even if they are halal. Thanks to his profession as a maintenance person, my husband was able to see some of the kitchens of these halal restaurants and they are not in the best condition. So, we make our own burgers at home. My daughter is also reluctant to visit these restaurants after she learned about their condition from her father,” Dilara added.

All parents in my interviews have already educated their children about halal food, and the latter have eventually become as proficient and mindful as their parents when shopping for a halal item. Sometimes they warn their parents about the possible non-halal ingredients. For example, Nusret said, “When in doubt, children tell us whether they have eaten one particular food before. Only after their approval, we eat it.”

Sacit related a similar anecdote. “I once bought a chewing gum and my daughters warned me about its ingredients. So, I put it back.”

There are a couple of issues that create controversy and contention within families. Vanilla extract has become one such contentious issue among the Turkish community. Some families never consume anything that contains vanilla extract, arguing that it has alcohol in it while some of them have softened their stance on it after asking some knowledgeable people—like one person in the community who had a PhD in chemistry. It is one of those gray areas that families could not agree on, but I have noticed that some families have not harshly approached the issue of vanilla extract anymore.

All these ingredients-related issues cost valuable time to people who want to follow a halal diet. Almost all families use apps like “Scan Halal” to make sure the product they are going to buy is halal. Therefore, checking a product before buying it; speaking to the owner before frequenting a restaurant; reading comments about the “halalness” or cleanliness of a restaurant on *Zabiha*, a website which lists halal restaurants with user ratings; negotiating with the waiter before ordering a partial halal menu; and similar practices sometimes take its toll on the community members. That is why some people have been relaxing their standards in order not to waste their time anymore. “I should think about my children. Once, a parent came to me and said, ‘I have two high-school age children. They told me that “You guys are boring. You all go to the same restaurants.”’ When children check their parents’ uniform practices, they look for the reason. Eventually, they put the blame on Islam because they think Islam forces them to dine at the same Turkish restaurant over and again. In the long terms, they cool off against Islam. I don’t want the same for my children. So, I try to take them to as

many different restaurants as possible,” Murat observed. His concerns were genuinely shared by other respondents as well. Thus, many families have now diversified their restaurant selections. But they do operate within some limitations because their actual selections are not unlimited. As seen in these examples, halal food represents not only a religious commitment, but also ‘an act of identity’ (Nasir and Pereira 2008:93).

Another thing that puts some of my respondents in a dilemma is non-standard practices by some other Turkish or non-Turkish Muslim families. “Sometimes, at school they serve some non-halal food and we are having a hard time explaining to our daughter that she shouldn’t eat it. She disagrees with us saying that ‘But my Muslim classmate or friend is eating it and she is Muslim, mom!’ Hazal pointed out this dilemma. Turkish parents are unwilling to compromise when it comes to what their children consume outside home. “We always pay attention to what they eat at school or in their friends’ home during a sleepover,” said Sebnem. “We want to make sure they don’t eat anything non-halal at school.” Therefore, when there is any birthday celebration at school, some families tell their children not to eat from it. They alternatively send halal cake from home so that their child does not feel excluded.

Melih himself has recently changed his stance on this issue. “I have a ‘make-it-easy’ approach and I practice it in my professional life. I used to feel I was practicing self-exclusion in these company gatherings like birthdays because I couldn’t eat the birthday cake. Now, I am eating it,” he said. Families look for any *fatwa* (religious edict or ruling) they could find to consume certain food items. “We learned that the donuts were permissible; so, we started eating them,” Soner noted. Some families are more selective. “I heard that if there is glaze on it, it is not halal,” one respondent said about donuts.

Celebrating Religious and Cultural Holidays

The Turkish community I observed celebrates Eid holidays at their cultural center. “The cultural center has served a great purpose especially during the Eid days,” said Sacit. As we will see in Chapter Three, the cultural center is not only the home to the weekend school, but also the mecca of their religious and social activities. “In the construction of children’s spirituality, the cultural center occupies an important place,” added Sacit. “If there was no cultural center, there would be a huge void. I think the cultural center enabled us to become Turkish and American at the same time.” While Sacit’s comment reflects his perception to see the center as a means for cultural integration, during my research, I did not find much evidence of this. The center is almost exclusively attended by the Turkish community. The mosque within the center is mostly attended by Turkish Muslims. The center has interfaith dialogue activities, but only a handful of volunteers from the Turkish community participate in these gatherings.

But the Turkish Cultural Center can be seen as a safe haven for this community. “We have always felt comfortable at the Cultural Center. So, we thought our children would feel the same way,” Seyda noted. “We have always trusted the environment there because we knew the parents. The existence of this trusted environment is good, but the environment always stays the same. That is the bad part,” says Zafer. “Instead of close and distant relatives, we have friends here in America,” said Irmak. This community helps keep us together. Since community members do not have any relatives here, with the exception of occasional visits by grandparents in some families for only a couple of months, each family sees each other as an extended family.

The existence of religious holidays like Christmas and Easter and cultural holidays like Halloween provides a challenge for most of the non-Christian religious communities (Seifert 2007). Turkish immigrants are no exception. I was told that in almost every family, there has been a moment at which children asked why they did not celebrate Christmas. Some families have dodged the question, while some of them clearly explained why they did not practice it.

Parents usually follow certain strategies to make sure their children are not jealous of Christmas, Easter, or other non-Islamic religious holidays. “We did some lighting decorations when kids were little. When they grew up, we didn’t do any of the decorations. Our older child knew what was going on, so he never asked for a Christmas tree. When they said something about Santa and his fictional presence, we told them to be respectful to others’ faith traditions,” Olcay said. In contrast, Cansel brought a Christmas tree home to satisfy the possible craving of her children. Most Turks see the Christmas tree as the symbol of a Christian holiday. That is why Cansel’s son was surprised to see the tree and he questioned her mother’s motives. “We are not Christian. Why did you get this?” was his reaction to Cansel. Families prioritize their children’s happiness in some cases. “If my son wanted a Christmas tree, I would definitely buy it. I wouldn’t want him to feel excluded,” Pervin said. Coming up with his own solution, Sezgin related a Catholic friend’s advice: If your children ask you why you don’t celebrate some holidays and festivals, you should say, “This is our family and this is how we do it.”

Similar to the situation in which older siblings help their younger siblings with their Turkish, they sometimes do the same thing when explaining religious and cultural differences to younger siblings. Yekta’s son, explaining why they do not celebrate

Christmas to his younger sibling is an important example of this. But some families also see no problem watching a Christmas movie during Christmas time. “We got some hot chocolate and marshmallows, and we watched a Christmas movie under the blanket,” Edis said, remembering the family activity on Christmas. Some families, like the one of Murat, even give gifts to their neighbors and include their children in the process. They visit their neighbors’ home together with their children. “After giving some Christmas gifts to a couple of neighbors, we got gifts from them a couple of days later,” Maryam remembers.

A common response to Christmas culture has recently arisen within Turkish families: decorating their homes during Ramadan. Many respondents, particularly the ones who came to the United States more than a decade ago, admit that they did not decorate their home a couple of years ago. Now, more than 80 percent of the families I interviewed said that they are doing Ramadan decorations. Those who do not mostly do not have any elementary school age children. Most decorations include the illumination of the front door/yard or preparing a “Ramadan corner” in one room where each family has different decoration ideas. “Last Ramadan, we got like 15 small gifts from Ross and put them around the fireplace. Almost every other day, we gave one of those gifts to our children,” Hazal said. This Christmas-like practice in Ramadan allows parents to help their children experience something similar to Christmas. Irmak also talked about how they prepared Ramadan socks, similar to decorative Christmas stockings.

Ramadan is indeed an important time period in which Muslim individuals elevate their spirituality during this holy month. Ramadan is also a good training ground for children who are made to get ready for their future fasting habits. When they are at preschool or early elementary school age, they are encouraged to fast for a few

hours or half a day. Once they are 9 or 10, they start full fasting, particularly over the weekends because there is school on weekdays. “We do activities in Ramadan as a family. Every day, they draw a prayer out of the box, read the prayer, and receive a gift,” Nezhir said. “We finished the entire Qur’an last Ramadan all together. It really added some extra spirituality to our home,” Sacit added.

The Movement members have clear cut rules regarding Christmas and their children mostly understand these rules. But things become murkier when it comes to other cultural holidays. Respondents reported that there has been a considerable increase in celebrating these holidays, especially Halloween. Some families who have been in the United States for more than a decade admitted they had not celebrated Halloween until recently. Nusret said, “We used to live on the East Coast. Within the Movement, there was almost nobody celebrating Halloween. We were discouraged by other friends to celebrate it then. But once we moved here, we saw more and more families celebrating it. Our children are now doing the trick or treating together with their best friends.” Bengi, however, talked about how being the pioneer of this celebration was difficult. “We were criticized for celebrating Halloween in the beginning. But then almost everyone started celebrating it.” Some families are now talking about how they would prepare for Halloween weeks ago, either shopping for a costume or decorating the front yard. “A few years ago, we were debating the celebration of Halloween in our WhatsApp groups whether it was theologically permissible to do any celebration,” Zafer said. “Now, almost everyone is celebrating it.” “It is a negotiation,” Sezgin commented. “(In Islam) there are some white areas, black areas, and gray areas. Halloween is a gray area. That is why we celebrate it.” Some families used certain life-changing incidents as a means to celebrate Halloween. “We didn't celebrate Halloween

in the past. But then our daughter started wearing a hijab and she now wears a Harry Potter costume which covers her hair. This was conducive to our celebration of Halloween,” said Melih.

I visited Murat and Maryam for one of their Halloween celebrations. Their home was crowded because Eylul, Yuksel, and Defne were there with their children. There was also another Turkish girl whose parents I had never seen. Once everyone gathered in the Yilmaz family’s home, they set out for the trick or treating. Maryam, Eylul, and Defne stayed at home, and Murat and Yuksel chaperoned the children for almost two hours. “We have been celebrating Halloween since our kids started school. We did not want them to feel lonely when their classmates, the next day, bragged about how many candies they got from trick or treating. I think it is a great opportunity to get to know people in your neighborhood.” I asked Murat if there was a particular reason Maryam or other women did not join them. “Can’t speak on behalf of others, but we always leave someone at home in case children come and knock on our door. When they do that, we want to make sure that they see a Muslim there and they get to taste Turkish candies instead of classic American ones (laughs). Joking aside, seeing a Muslim being a part of the Halloween celebration is important. Most of the Islamophobes say ‘They hate us’ about the Muslims. I guess they have a point because many Muslims do not celebrate cultural holidays in America. When they do not see you as part of the celebration, they feel we dislike them. We don’t.” Murat’s lengthy statement reveals that Halloween has been serving as a litmus test for certain families. Those who celebrate Halloween are on track for integration into American society more easily than those who do not celebrate.

Moral Education

If there was one issue on which all respondents unanimously agreed, it was the necessity of moral education that would help build good character traits in children. While this statement seems like a no-brainer, it has more underlying significance for the members of the Gülen Movement. In Turkey, the Erdoğan government, known for its Islamist stance, has become synonymous with corruption. My respondents argued that the government's corrupt activities have left a deep stain on Islam's image. "The recent corruption has tarnished the beautiful face of Islam," Erkin said. Therefore, all respondents, most of whom admitted that they voted for Erdoğan in the past, preferred that their children have good character traits and high moral standards rather than to be religiously observant, if they have to choose between the two. "Religious education is important, but moral education should come first. Children need to learn about morality through good examples," commented Eylül—who also noted that most of the religious people in Turkey lack good character traits. "When we sent our children to the weekend school, we did not only want it for religious education, but moral education as well," Seyda also noted. Being moral, at least in theory, seems to be the utmost priority of the Turkish community. Most respondents did not necessarily tie it to rituals, disagreeing with Winchester's study about creating moral disposition through rituals (Winchester 2008).

While everyone agrees on the significance of morality, teachers at TCC's the weekend have mostly done the opposite (see Chapter One). "We unfortunately talk about Islam before moral issues," observed Zafer, who was aware of the situation. "It should be the opposite." Sezgin sees moral education as fundamentally important. "In early ages, what we call religious education should be nothing but moral education and

love of God.” He also recalls that he received love from his maternal grandmother, not religious education. “If a father doesn’t kiss his daughter, somebody else will kiss her,” Gencay said, emphasizing the importance of love in the family. Several respondents like Gencay mentioned the importance of displaying extra love for their daughters. Since Turkish parents emphasized moral issues, I asked them a hypothetical question of choosing between an immoral Muslim and a moral non-Muslim as a marriage candidate for their children. “I prefer my children to get married to a moral non-Muslim than an immoral Muslim,” was the unanimous response by all the respondents. But they still see this possibility as a last resort if they are unable to find a Muslim candidate in good character.

Despite the importance of morality, none of the parents I interviewed sit down and talk about good character traits with their children. Instead, families prefer an organic approach in which they hope that their children emulate the good behaviors of their parents, relatives, teachers, and friends. They prefer to provide moral education when something happens or they discuss some character traits through examples. Oyku and Kerem, for example, talk about moral issues while watching a TV show or a movie—discussing the decisions of the characters on the screen. “We stop the show and ask our children whether the actor did the right thing or not.” Nezh, on the other hand, mentioned that they provide moral education through games. For example, when their daughter plays Roblox, a very popular computer game among the elementary school children, they monitor the characters and talk about their behaviors. He also stressed that when they see a problem, he defers to his wife because her intervention includes a pedagogical approach, thanks to the training she received. Yonca does not agree with

on-the-spot intervention. “I don’t think any issue will be solved if I make an immediate intervention.”

As part of the “lead by example” approach, Turkish parents try to be at their best when they are around their children. They admitted to me that they become extra careful with their behaviors if their child is in the room. “We feel like we are constantly being monitored by our kids. When I do something wrong, they warn me. My daughter, for example, warns me when I gossip about someone,” Seyda said. Parents display front stage behavior even at home, reminiscent of Goffman’s theory of front stage and backstage behavior (Goffman 1959). “Our children trust us,” Ece said. “Because we never lie to them. If I say something, that must be true.” But everything is not that easy when it comes to representation. “Sometimes our children possess a dual character,” said Zafer. When I asked for clarification, he said, “They behave differently at school and home. They give us what we want to see here at home.” When I asked him what forces children to act like this, he related the issue to pressure. “We pressurize them to look like the children we want them to be.” His wife Seyda supported her husband’s statement. “How come the children keep their desks tidy at their public school, but not at the weekend school?” When I asked the reason for this dramatic difference, she said, “They probably see weekend school as a fun place. But this is also related to the manners their families provide to these children.”

While some children might display dual behavior, some others act more morally in certain situations than their parents. “If we criticize any group of people, our daughter warns us, saying we are becoming racists,” Gonca said. This sort of warning by high school or college kids towards their parents was told in several anecdotes. Some Turkish immigrants bring racist, sexist, homophobic, or anti-Semitic sentiments or

ideas in their baggage, so to speak, when they first arrived in the United States. Having been born and/or growing up in America, their children are more mindful of such unacceptable behaviors, boldly warning their parents if necessary. Murat told an interesting anecdote about such discriminatory language. “Once I was doing a presentation to a group of decision-makers about the interfaith dialogue activities I volunteered for. I was showing them a couple of photos. In one photo, a rabbi was seen in front of a donation box to show the similarity of a word, which means charity, in Turkish and Hebrew. Somebody from that group said ‘Oh, this Jew surely knows where to stand.’ I was so disappointed and upset that I got immediately down after hearing these remarks. I still lament the fact that I should have said something on the spot.”

Decline in Religiosity

Children’s early interest in religion is strongly connected to the religiosity of their parents (Hart 1990). When parents’ interest in or connection with Islam declines, the moments of religious socialization also decline. That is why I asked the respondents whether there has been any change in their religiosity recently. More than half of the respondents said their religiosity had been in decline for the last few years, male respondents reporting such change more than females. They put forward several reasons behind this decline.

One of the most popular reasons is the recent developments in Turkey that happened to the Gülen Movement after the coup attempt in 2016. Respondents were disappointed about the alleged role of the Movement in the coup attempt, as well as about the corrupt activities of the Erdoğan government. “Before 2013 or 2014, I would see myself as a religious person. Now, I only see myself as a human. In those days, I’d

probably rate my religiosity 9 out of 10, now I'd only be 2. Religiosity doesn't produce morality. I think what matters is our own relationship with other people," summarized Levent his stance. Levent is one of several respondents who think this way. He then asked me this question: "Are you going to give the wheat to the king or to his people?" When I asked for clarification, he said, in his analogy, the king represents God, who doesn't need our wheat, which is prayers. Interestingly, his wife thinks that religion could produce morality.

For other respondents, their religiosity is in decline because of work schedule. "Once I went into business, my religiosity decreased with the hectic tempo that comes with it. I still pray, but I have given up many other rituals. So, sometimes I ask myself whether I was doing them because of the social circle I was in?" says Poyraz, alluding to his more active days with the Movement. Like Poyraz, many respondents admitted that they barely find time for the required prayers and rituals. "I don't have time for the extra supplications," Yuksel remarked.

According to some respondents, there is what they call "the American effect," which means that coming to America and getting used to its luxuries and comfort have some secularizing effect. "America decreases one's spirituality. In Turkey, everybody hears the call to prayer. People practice their religion more easily. Even with increasing religiosity, my reading habit is in decline," observed Yonca. Tansel decided to protect his children from the American effect. "Our children are at home as if they are in Turkey. They are in a protected area. We are physically in America, but we live in a small Turkey." Parents' attempt to "protect" their children in America was a common theme.

Some families' decline in religiosity, as well as the American effect, is also reflected in their food consumption patterns as well. "When she first came to America,

my wife wouldn't even drink Coke. Now, she is open to new tastes," Caner noted. Some Muslim communities have always had problems with Coke, associating it with imperialism, Israel, and anti-Muslim sentiments (Tagliabue 2002). Some respondents mentioned that in the 1980s and 90s, they would never drink Coke in Turkey. "Some would do it out of their hate on America, and some would refrain from Coke because of its unknown formula. In my high school years, we would drink what we called 'yellow Coke,' like Fanta, Schweppes, and Yedigun," Edis recalled.

The luxuries America has to offer have enabled Turks to lead a more comfortable life financially. All my respondents live in the best suburbs of the town, all send their children to the best schools, all driving above-average cars including some Teslas, and all share holiday pictures on their social media accounts. Once people take care of the language barrier and visa issues, they experience a vertical jump in their social status. This, in turn, can have implications for religiosity. Among the oldcomers, the decline in religiosity is more obvious. Melih said, "I was more religious during my first 10 years in America, but it has now declined." "We used to live close to Mr. Gülen's residence in Pennsylvania. Being close to his residence helped us maintain our spiritual awareness. But once we moved from there, my religiosity decreased," Defne noted.

When discussing religiosity and its possible decline, my respondents sometimes related that topic to the Gülen Movement, with some seeing it as a protector of sorts. The Movement, similar to its charter schools, has a private school in town. Some well-to-do families send their children there, but it is not an Islamic school. Melih deliberately used the English term "controlled exposure" for his family's practice to protect their children. I asked for an explanation of the term. "This school is like a protective shield. It is drug free and the Turkish teachers provide guidance; not in an

obvious way, but in a limited one. They do not directly talk about religion, but mostly good character traits like hard work, honesty, and integrity.” Melih seems to have found a “sacred canopy” (Berger 1967) for his children through this private school.

For other respondents, being away from the Movement’s activities is a reason for their decline in religiosity. “While it seems my spirituality has been in decline because I remain away from the Movement, I still serve people by sharing my professional knowledge,” said Zeynel. However, the main reason why some Movement members are not participating in it. Ece, for instance, admitted that she felt like she had been deceived. “The more I obeyed my superiors, the more I felt like I had been fooled. I forgot the fact that my superiors were also humans. I realized I had never prioritized myself. I have now discovered myself. I feel enlightened. Of course, I know the basics of Islam, and I won’t need the Movement to embrace Islam. My daily supplications decreased, but my gratitude increased.” When I asked for clarification about discovering herself, she said, “We are here on a Green Card. We chose the city we live in now by ourselves. This happened for the first time in our lives. Before that, we would go wherever the Movement assigned us. Now, we have the complete freedom to choose where to live and it is a liberating feeling.” In a similar vein, Tansel summarized his spiritual change. “I don’t get the same spiritual satisfaction from my prayers I used to get. The *sohbets* are not as satisfying as the ones I used to attend.

Despite experiencing an emotional rupture, Cansel still has friends from the Movement. This is a common theme with most of the respondents who went through a similar process. They mostly hang out with people from the Movement. Even when the membership ties are severed, the friendship still continues. One reason is the fact that GM members have a hard time making friends outside the Movement. There are several

groups from which friends can be drawn, but there are also obstacles for each group in doing so. The first group is the Turks outside the Movement. We can roughly divide this first group into Secular Turks and pro-government Turks. The worldview and lifestyle of the former is pretty much at odds with the GM members. Secular Turks generally drink alcohol and they are mostly not practicing Muslims, whereas GM members, even when they are disconnected from the Movement, still abstain from alcohol and mostly continue their religious observations albeit at a decreasing rate. Pro-government Turks, on the other hand, are the least likely candidates for the GM members because of the government oppression on the GM members. The second group of people is comprised of non-Turkish Muslims, but the language barrier and some theological differences make it hard for GM members. The last group is regular Americans, but this time, in addition to the language barrier, cultural and religious differences make it difficult for GM members to gain new friends. As a result, they continue to hang out with the same circle of friends even when they are emotionally disconnected.

“When you are busy with volunteer activities in the Movement, you do not question anything about the Movement. After the December 17/25 process, our voluntary responsibilities decreased and questioning increased. Of course, when I question the Movement, I also question myself, my previous motivations, etc. Being grateful to the Movement also prevented us from questioning. When that gratitude is gone, you start questioning everything,” says Sheyda. The July 15 coup attempt was like the 9/11 of the Movement. It seriously damaged, if not completely, destroyed the Movement. Zafer, Sheyda’s husband, agrees with her: “July 15 was like the slowing down of a super-fast car. When you slow down, you start noticing the things around you. We started questioning the things in the Movement. When people elevate Gülen to a

Prophet status, you cannot criticize him. I started seeing Gülen as an ordinary human. The Movement, I realized, didn't turn out to be the ultimate point or the place for ultimate knowledge and spirituality. We thought there is no better source than the *Risale-i Nur Collection*.”

Finally, a small number of respondents reported an *increase* or positive change in the direction of their religiosity. “In terms of rituals, there is some decline, but I channeled it to self-reflection. I am now talking more about certain concepts like Islam, religiosity, and meaning of life,” Caner noted. Ceyda's situation is similar to that of Caner. “My rituals are more or less the same, but my perception, understanding, and interpretation have changed. Now I am able to think more profoundly.” “With the arrival of our children, my religiosity has increased,” Yonca said, tying her increasing religiosity to the presence of her children. “When I read a religious book to my children, my faith is renewed and I feel invigorated. I also learn something new during these reading activities.”

Discussion

The interviewed respondents display both similarities and differences in terms of the religious socialization they experienced as children. They mainly were raised in one of three types of families: religious families, cultural Muslims (or *Anatolian Muslims*), and secular families. Each family type had its own manner of religious socialization, which led to different experiences, but regardless of the family type in which they were raised, all the respondents experienced religious education similarly. The most common activity, while being raised in Turkey, was to attend the neighborhood mosque to learn Qur'an and some religious knowledge. While youngsters at home, these respondents

learned their religion mostly from their mothers, and learned good character traits from both parents. Fathers particularly became role models for the respondents in terms of the good character traits exhibited in their businesses. While growing up, each of the respondents had someone who influenced them spiritually—such as their parents, grandparents, siblings, distant relatives, or schoolteachers.

Joining the Gülen Movement constituted a milestone in the lives of the interviewees. Most of them were recruited by their peers or someone older than them. This decision to join the movement allowed the participants to become more religious. For example, they started performing daily prayers regularly. In the overwhelming majority of the cases, the interviewed respondents married someone from the Movement. As a result, married couples were on the same page, at least in theory, when it came to providing a religious education to their future child(ren).

As for the religious socialization style of these parents, the literature on socialization styles usually focus on parenting in general rather than on parenting with a religious intent and purpose. That distinction matters: Baumrind's typology of authoritarian, authoritative, permissive, and neglecting parenting styles (Baumrind 1968, 1978, 1997) seem too static for what I observed at the weekend school and heard in interviews, as the parenting styles of the respondents shifted over time. Out of the 27 families I interviewed, only two families had one child. The rest had multiple children, with the arrival of those additional children prompting a shift in styles. While I focused on practices and issues in the bulk of the chapter, I turn in this discussion to that dynamic.

The interviews I conducted revealed a recurring theme in most families whose religious socialization strategies and practices change over time. I named these changes

as “First Phase of Religious Socialization,” (FPRS) and “Second Phase of Religious Socialization,” (SPRS). This shift was explicitly reported by most parents. Those who did not openly talk about it, implied its existence. The first condition for SPRS to happen is two have at least two children, which was the case in more than 93 percent of our families. The shift between the two phases occurs as follows. Parents generally show the utmost attention for the religious education of their first child. Their attention dwindles with the arrival of second or third child depending on when those children were born. As a result, they put forth less effort for the subsequent child(ren). There are several reasons for this shift which is detailed below and summarized in Table 4.

[Table 4 About Here]

The actors in FPRS are predominantly the parents. They oversee most of the religious education. My respondents told me that they used several different ways to socialize their children—including reading a storybook, teaching prayers, being a good role model, doing social activities together, teaching Qur’an, celebrating religious holidays, telling stories, catering their subconscious, etc. In FPRS, parents might get some outside help such as finding someone else to teach the Qur’an or sending them to an Islamic or weekend school, but the heavy lifting is handled by the parents, particularly by mothers. Most of FPRS takes place in pre-school and elementary school. In SPRS, there are several actors that join the process including schools, private teachers, mentors, siblings, relatives, friends, and parents. The role of parents in SPRS varies, but they are not as active as they were in FPRS.

All families with two or more children reported a similar trend that their religious education efforts, after the first child, somewhat decreased. For instance, Seyda mentioned that they tried to teach many things to their first child, fearing that he would

not be able to learn later. Their motivation to teach drastically dropped with their second and third child. Zafer, in support of his wife, added: “We were young and inexperienced back in Turkey. I now realize that we put a lot of pressure on our first child. We were still better than an average family in terms of consciousness, but we lacked some important qualities in general standards. We developed new perspectives in America. I think we are making a big mistake by prioritizing faith over morality. We need to give some opportunity to our children to question certain things in their faith.”

Hazal pointed out the hectic tempo of her life and exhaustion as reasons for not paying as much attention to their second child as the first one. “Our second child hasn’t received the same amount of Islamic education as her older sister. She had her maternal grandmother and grandfather. She spent time with them. We were too tired to do the same things as we did with our first child.” “You exert all your energy with the [religious] education of the first child. Everything, including all your family routines, revolves around that first child. Your routine changes with the second child,” said Irmak. “I think when you realize that everything worked perfectly with the first two children, you automatically assume that it will also work with the third one. I guess we have become kind of sluggish with the third one.”

There was another dynamic, as well, that includes the first child. It seems like parental motivation decreases after the first child reaches the age of six. Many parents talked about the importance of providing religious education during the preschool age. “I think this period is very important to form the spiritual infrastructure of the child,” Hazal noted. Several other parents echoed Hazal’s points. Once the child passes that period, however, parents display some relaxation, slowly moving to the second phase.

The second stage (SPRS) plays out for the interviewed parents in two main ways. Parents either decrease their efforts directed to the religious socialization of their children, not engaging with the teaching process as much as they once did, or they outsource it altogether. The former is reminiscent of the *natural growth* parenting style described by Lareau (2002). In that style, parents retain expectations for their children and their socialization, but among other aspects of this style, they also allow that socialization to happen organically rather than via structured activities. The latter resembles more the *concerted cultivation* style than the natural growth one (Lareau 2002) in that parents rely upon structured activities that are formally scheduled with a tutor, teacher, or a mentor to help with the religious and moral education of their children. The common point for both pathways is the fact that parental involvement decreases. Parents prefer monitoring their children's religious socialization instead of direct involvement.

When digging deeper into the dynamism of these two phases, other themes reveal themselves. For example, parental religiosity level differs in FPRS and SPRS. In the former, parents are mostly religious, and religion is mostly very important for them, whereas in the latter, their religiosity level fluctuates between high and low. SPRS is not necessarily the result of decline in religiosity, although that was the case for some respondents. One respondent who wore no headscarf preferred her daughter not to wear it, either. This looks like Lacy's (2004) "strategic assimilation" approach because she wanted to have her Muslim daughter survive in the Christian heavy world without experiencing any stigma or discrimination. Likewise, all male parents applied this to their no-beard practice as they did not want to be stereotyped based on their look.

The bi-directionality of the religious socialization process also is evident in the shift from one phase to the other. During the FPRS, a child is brought to another home to play with other children, but in most cases, they do not have a say in selecting their friends or classmates—their parents do. In SPRS, children display more agency and deliberately choose their playdate. When Maryam and her friends wanted to teach some religion to their children, they organized something with Pelin's best friends.

“Otherwise, we wouldn't be able to make those gatherings possible,” Maryam recalled.

Parents' language preference also shifts across these styles. They speak Turkish with their children. When they want to read a religious storybook, they pick a Turkish one and they read it to children in most cases. In SPRS, children speak English more freely and with other members of the family. Parents' English fluency becomes better in SPRS. They are more comfortable communicating in English with their children. Still, instead of reading an English book, they provide the book to the child and encourage them to read it.

Holidays are celebrated in both FPRS and SPRS, but children are more passive in the former. Families, especially in religious holidays, make sure their children are entertained, but parents choose where this entertainment should take place. Also, they sometimes move from one home to another to visit their friends, unwittingly depriving their children of the fun they anticipate. In SPRS, children mostly choose where to go and what kind of activities they would like to do. Likewise, American cultural holidays are extensively celebrated in SPRS, again with the participation of the best friends of the children. Most families during FPRS shied away from the celebration of Halloween or Fourth of July, trying to protect their children from external influences. Halal diet, both at home consumption and restaurant selection, is a *sine qua non* for the families in the

FPRS stage. They give no compromise in halal consumption. On top of that, families in this stage usually dislike or do not try American food. Having a Turkish style breakfast is a prerequisite to protect the culture and eventually the faith. When they move to SPRS state, they continue their home consumption in the same way in most cases, but they become more flexible with their restaurant selection after their children demand trying new tastes.

The second phase also coincides with the (partial) assimilation of the parents who start celebrating the American cultural holidays such as Thanksgiving and Fourth of July. As mentioned by the respondents, most parents were reluctant or hesitant to celebrate non-religious holidays because many felt they would be Americanized if they did it.

Controlled exposure is the final crucial theme that came up during the interviews. Although it was explicitly used only once by Melih and Ece, the term summarized the parental effort to protect their children from the *American effect*. The couple used the term in the original English, and they meant the existence of the Movement-affiliated private school in town. The term implies that children receive secular education, but they are not in public school. In the words of Melih, “They are few in numbers, but not a minority.” He mentioned the presence of Turkish teachers, Turkish administrators, and Turkish classmates. Also, he talked about a spiritual guidance effort for the female students at that school. “It is more like a character education, but it aims to inspire children with good traits like hard work, honesty, and integrity,” Melih added. This is again reminiscent of those middle class African Americans in Lacy’s (2004) study, who maintained their ties with the larger black community through cultural institutions. Similarly, Turkish parents utilized the cultural center, weekend school, and family

gatherings to protect their cultural and religious values without compromising the larger world around themselves.

Controlled exposure is reminiscent of the term sacred canopy (Berger 1967). Just like religion, as a *sacred canopy*, serves as a protective shield and helps people cope with life's uncertainties, the Movement-affiliated Turkish community functions in the same way against the "uncertainties" and "dangers" of the American lifestyle. Parents see their entire community as a sacred canopy. One respondent compared their own community to an aquarium. "Just like a fish will soon die when it gets out of water, I don't think we will be able to maintain our spiritual awareness if we leave the Movement behind." Thus, the overwhelming majority of Movement members' friends are also from the Movement. They hang out at the cultural center. They do social activities together. In a Durkheimian manner, when people come together, they worship the cultural center or the community itself because for many respondents "There is no life outside the Turkish community."

The final chapter will give us an in-depth perspective of the themes we covered in this chapter. The Yilmaz family's religious socialization experience will not only allow us to apply what I have found so far, but also bring our perspective to a micro level. That way, we will be able to take a closer look at the religious socialization process, its actors, children's agency, and parents' choices.

Table 4: Comparison of the Two Phases of the Religious Socialization Process

	First Phase of Religious Socialization (FPRS)	Second Phase of Religious Socialization (SPRS)
Actors	Mostly parents	Full-time Islamic or weekend schools, private teachers/tutors, mentors, siblings, friends, and parents
Parental Religiosity Level	Mostly high	Ranges from high to low
Social Connections	Child meets fellow learners at weekend schools or religious settings	Child comes together with their best friends in spiritual settings
Language Preference	Native tongue of the parents (Turkish)	Mixed (English and Turkish)
Celebration of Religious Holidays	Treated like a ritual, child is passive, but still entertained	Americanized celebration, child is active
Celebration of Cultural Holidays	Limited or none	Family celebration, child is a participant
Use of Religious Storybooks	Parents read in their own native tongue	Children are given books or encouraged to read in English
Halal food consumption	Home consumption and restaurant preference strictly halal	Home consumption mostly halal, restaurant preference varies

CHAPTER THREE

FORGETTING ISTANBUL IN AMERICA:

THE CASE OF THE YILMAZ FAMILY

Introduction

The “sacred canopy” (Berger 1967) is one of the concepts that came up in Chapter Two. This famous concept implies that religion encompasses almost everything in life, being the ultimate meaning producer. That way, we are able to make sense of things we encounter in our daily life. When one respondent said, “Islam covers everything in my life. I can regulate all parts of my life according to Islam,” she was inadvertently referring to religion serving like a sacred canopy. While there are complicated arguments associated with that term, it provides a metaphor that resonates in the present for those moving between two worlds – providing an overarching meaning (Lacy 2004; Tatum and Browne 2019). Also, as a result of secularization occurring in modern times, we do not see religion acting like a sacred canopy that unites most everyone. Indeed, some people are standing on their little but strong islands of faith, separated by specific beliefs but connected via a land-mass of “religiosity” underneath those islands (Madsen 2009).

When we consider Turkish immigrants in the United States, particularly those affiliated with the Gülen Movement, we see that these metaphors have resonance. Their distinctive canopy (or controlled exposure in their own terms) gives meaning in a country that stigmatizes their faith (PEW Research Center 2017a), yet their emphasis on universal ethical principles can connect them to other faith communities through their interfaith dialogue activities. The Movement people grapple with their present reality in

the wake of their traumatic experiences in Turkey and either take shelter in religion or they traverse within the religion by seeking a more viable version of Islam.

In previous chapters, we have seen this dynamism through weekend school observations and parent interviews. We have heard their accounts of creating their own islands or taking shelter in their canopy. People engage in these acts within their lived religion (Ammerman 2020). Hence, it makes sense to observe people in action. Such observations have been conducted at the organizational level (Ebaugh and Chafetz 2000; Gjerde 1986; Numrich 2009) and individual level (Menjívar 1999). This chapter is also a partial response to Cadge and Ecklund's invitation (2007) to study lived religion outside the religious centers.

In addition to families and weekend schools, we will take a closer look at other actors of religious socialization such as friends and media. While my unit of observation is only one family, I will focus on processual clarity, namely how religious socialization works at the micro level in all its details—with some 1500 hours of observation enabling this focus. This practice could be treated as extending the extended case method (Small 2009).

Meet the Family

When I started the observations, it was the first few months of the pandemic during which the family started to spend more time together. It coincided with the time Murat's classes were shifted online. Maryam, on the other hand, had just opened an online business when my observations began. Her business was slowly booming, and she was busy with packaging the things they had sold online. Other family members were helping Maryam, although the children were not super enthusiastic in doing so.

The parents promised them the chance to earn hourly payments. After the pandemic-related restrictions were lifted, my observations took place mostly outside the home, following the family with their social life, capturing snippets of religious socialization along the way.

I first met Murat in one of the interfaith dialogue events of the Gülen Movement, which is one of its hallmark activities. Serving as the program MC, Murat had already been an active participant in such dialogue events in town. After his name was brought up as one of the potential candidates for in-depth observation, I asked him whether he would be interested in such a project, and he was pretty curious about it from the get-go. During our very first meeting, he told me that he had been going through a mental and spiritual evolution over the past few years, obviously causing him to develop a complicated relationship with the Gülen Movement. On several issues, he disagrees with many people in the Movement, including his wife. Yet still, the majority of people he hangs out with are from the Movement, although he has more non-Muslim and non-Turkish friends than an average Movement member.

Murat was born and raised in a big city in Turkey. He had a happy childhood despite his family's relative poverty. He grew up among his maternal grandparents who were practicing Muslims, but most people in the family lacked theoretical knowledge. "I did not learn much from my parents because they didn't know a lot. As a third grader, I went to the neighborhood mosque to learn how to read the Qur'an, and I did. By the time I was a middle schooler, I realized that I forgot it because I had never practiced it. My family was half-secular, half-cultural Muslim, so I am one of those rare people who learned how to read the Qur'an twice. I guess it was in the summer of 9th grade. I found an instructional book and learned by myself." Murat lived

in the big town until the end of middle school, after which he went to a small town for high school. Then, he went to one of the best state universities in Turkey. After graduating from college, he worked for a Movement-affiliated private school. In these years, he met his future wife through a common friend (not someone from the Movement). They came to the United States for Murat's higher education.

He joined the Movement when he was in high school. "Actually, they had had interest in me since my middle school days. I was in sixth grade and hanging out at a bookstore where they mostly sold religious books. There was a college student who showed some interest and he would come, make tea for me, and have some conversation. Later, I realized that these were recruitment efforts and the bookstore was owned by a Movement member. In eighth grade, some classmates, who were from the Movement, tried to take me to an apartment rented by the Movement. There, we would play games and do our homework, sometimes receiving free tutoring in Math. They would never pray when we were around. Since it was a secular town, they were probably being careful in order not to take any attention. Then, I went to another town for high school. The same recruitment efforts continued there. Some of my classmates, I later realized, were already from the Movement. They would invite us to houses affiliated with the Movement." I asked Murat why he still wanted to join the Movement although he knew that these were recruitment efforts. "Because I had always been curious about spiritual matters. The people in the Movement were nice to me. Besides, most of my best friends were either part of the Movement or they were being recruited like me. I just wanted to socialize with them. I went to a small town for high school and stayed in a government-owned dormitory. What else could I do besides socializing with my friends

in the dorm?” As Murat mentioned, the Movement provided regular socialization, on top of the religious socialization, opportunity for high school students like Murat.

Not only did Murat start praying regularly after joining the Movement, but he also had to hide it from his parents. “I started praying regularly when I was in ninth grade. But I couldn’t do it consistently because I would slack off during holidays when I was with my family. I guess I became more consistent starting from 10th grade. Then I never gave up praying. The city I grew up in was a secular one. So, praying at a young age was a stigma in the environment where I grew up. If you start praying at an early age like high school, people assume that you have joined a *tariqah* or a religious community and this means you are brainwashed. That is why I was super scared for my mom to find out I was praying,” Murat noted.

This sort of statement might seem odd, but when you consider the conditions of Turkey, a secular country with a Muslim majority population, there has always been a tension between the two worldviews. “My high school and college years coincided with the February 28 process in Turkey. You know it was tough times.” The “February 28 process” is the short name for the 1997 Turkish Military Memorandum in which the secular military establishment gave an ultimatum to the then-Islamist government that resulted in the resignation of the latter. While the incident seems to have taken place between the military and the government, it had effects on the daily lives of religious and/or conservative people in Turkey. Female college students were not allowed to enter campuses with their headscarf on, some religious government employees were blacklisted, exiled, or sacked. The scores of those who attended imam-hatip schools (vocational schools that train future imams and preachers) were marked down during the college entrance exam when they aimed for a profession other than being an imam.

Thus, there was some political and social pressure on the conservative population. “I was staying at a government-owned dormitory in high school. One night, some school admins raided our dormitory and searched for religious books, cassettes, etc. When they found some religious publications or audio cassettes, they confiscated them and talked to those students one on one, advising them not to engage in any such religious activities at school,” Murat recalled, stating that he had his fair share of traumas from the tension-filled political environment in Turkey.

Maryam was a small town girl. Her family had a small farm, but they were also a middle class family. Maryam’s father had a serious illness before Maryam was born. Therefore, he was out of work for several years, putting most of the burden on Maryam’s mother. Their ties with Islam can be described as *Anatolian Islam*, a concept I summarized in Chapter Two. In general, Maryam’s family observed Islam mostly at the cultural level. She told me that her parents did not regularly perform their daily prayers. “My father would not even attend Friday prayers. He was reluctant about the daily rituals because nobody taught him anything about Islam when he was a little boy. This unfavorable situation continued until he passed away. My mom, on the other hand, was too busy to pray although she would pray occasionally. In addition to the things, she was supposed to do on the farm, she would take care of the animals we had, cook for the family, and do other house chores. But she would always fast in Ramadan until she had diabetes later in her life. She also went to *hajj* (Muslim pilgrimage).” Normally, Turkish people go to *hajj* as couples, but Maryam’s mother went there with her brother when her husband was reluctant to go. Since then, her mother prays five times a day regularly. Maryam did not get a religious education from her parents, but like other girls in the

neighborhood, she went to the neighborhood mosque where they would learn how to read the Qur'an.

Maryam did not pray regularly until she joined the Movement in college. Murat went to high school in another town, and he was recruited there. For Maryam's recruitment, she had to change her town. "But I had always been a spiritual person. I was never far away from religion. I just didn't do the rituals on a regular basis, that's it. In my childhood, I would dream about God and what he looked like. I would go to *Tarawih* prayer in Ramadan with my mom. I would also fast in Ramadan. I started to stay at a Movement-affiliated dormitory in my freshman year in college. I liked the ideals of the Movement and prayed regularly. But it wasn't until my sophomore year I decided to wear a hijab. My dad was furious at first as he didn't want me to wear it. My mom halfheartedly accepted my decision. But during my sophomore year, I left that dorm to join a friend to stay together. We were four girls and none of the other girls were from the Movement. That experience stalled my spiritual progress. I didn't feel very comfortable with them. So, I decided to stay at a Movement-affiliated house again in my junior year at the expense of my roommates' protests. I continued to stay in such houses until I got married to Murat. Even when I found a job in another town, I still stayed in those houses." These houses, my respondents reported, seem to have functioned like a "sacred canopy," to use Berger's (1967) term. They protect people from moral digressions and help them maintain their spiritual stability. Gülen has called "metaphysical tension" or "spiritual awareness" (Ergil 2012).

There are several common denominators among Murat's best friends. First, the majority of these people do not see themselves as a dedicated member of the Movement anymore, although they are best friends with such members. They hang out, pray, and

celebrate together, but their relationship with the Movement can be described as “loose.” I use the term *loose* because most of these people are not taking any active roles in the Movement anymore: They do not volunteer for Movement events, they do not take leadership positions, nor do they join important decision-making meetings. They do not make donations to the Movement, either, although some of them send money to Movement members in Turkey and Greece. They do not necessarily want their children to be a member of the Movement in the future. They have few, if any, friends from non-Turkish Muslims, non-Muslim Americans, or the Turks who are not Movement members, but the number of non-Movement member friends is on the rise. But still, they do not altogether exclude themselves from the Movement, either because in the absence of other immediate and distant family members, other people in the Movement function like a family. Also, these families still come to the cultural center for Friday prayer, Eid celebration, and other community celebrations like marriage. Some of them also send their children to TCC’s weekend school.

The Religious and Moral Socialization of Selim and Pelin

The Yilmaz family practices their religious duties, but it is hard to describe them as a “traditional” religious family for reasons described below. Both Murat and Maryam regularly perform their daily prayers. They fast during Ramadan. Maryam wears a hijab. Their son Selim also practices, although his commitment was initially less compared to his parents. Pelin, on the other hand, sometimes joins the prayer. Her parents occasionally encourage her to pray, but they do not force her. They do not force Selim, either, but they remind him about the prayers when he forgets or slacks off.

Five prayers are part of the daily schedule in the family. The daily routine is mostly organized around these prayers. For example, if they need to go out as a family, they make sure that they do the prayer first. Except for the sunrise and early noon, there is always prayer time. When somebody wants to pray, they ask others whether they have done the prayer or not. If the answer is negative, they say they will wait for them to get ready—which includes having the ritual ablution, or *wudu*. In most cases, Maryam, Murat, and Selim pray together. During her period, Murat and Selim do pray, and Murat does not call his wife to the prayer. Pelin is seldom called or encouraged. When she joins, sometimes she does not cover her hair. Also, Pelin sometimes stands next to her father when he starts praying. Normally, women pray behind men, but Pelin sometimes insists on praying next to his father, who gladly agrees and keeps her next to himself. “Since we pray as a family, I really don’t mind who is standing where. I even sometimes call Pelin to stand next to me. In the past, I didn’t want both kids to stand next to me because they used to giggle and distract each other. Now, they are ok, though,” Murat said. Despite his indifference, I have never seen his wife Maryam standing next to him. She has never requested to stand next to her husband, either. The others rarely warn her to wear the headscarf, as well.

Prayers are sometimes performed quickly if they coincide with something important or if the family is in the middle of something. If Murat has an online teaching duty or a meeting, he wants to make sure he has ample time before or after the class/meeting. Likewise, Maryam, when she is about to go out, makes sure that she does the prayer first, but she sometimes postpones it until her return. When the family holds a movie night or another family activity, depending on the season (because prayer times

dramatically change in different seasons), they complete their prayer before watching the movie or they stop the movie and pray.

Before the children learned how to pray, the family did the socialization through children's books. Maryam told me that she used to read a lot of children's books to her children, at least half of them religious in content. "I used to read a book before they went to bed almost every night." When I asked about the language, she said she only read Turkish books. "We actually had never spoken English until they started school because we knew they were going to be fluent in English once they go to school. We wanted to make sure they had a strong foundation in their mother tongue," Maryam said. "Did you read for both children?" I asked. "Yes, but we did it more for Selim than Pelin." When I asked about the reason, she said, "I guess we became busier. Maybe, I lost my enthusiasm, I don't know. There wasn't any overwhelming difference like 90 percent to 10 percent, maybe more like 60 to 40 percent. Pelin has always liked reading more than her brother. She would even sleep with her books when she was little although she didn't know how to read by then." She also told me that Murat also used to read books, but not as much as Maryam. "In the past when they were little, I would teach them the Qur'an and the memorizations of the prayers, etc. Once they grew up, I didn't have the time and the enthusiasm to continue. Murat has always been busy. Also, I used to read the Qur'an almost every day. I don't have time now or maybe I have just become lazy."

Maryam's statement insinuated a complaint about Murat, who told me that children leaned on Maryam in earlier years for their religious education. Nowadays, Murat, once in a while, reads from a religious book and explains it to the children. He either reads from the sources he has found on the internet or he reads one of the Islamic

books intended for the adults. He replaces advanced vocabulary with the age-appropriate ones. The books or other resources are all in English, and he mostly explains in English with occasional Turkish utterances. Maryam, on the other hand, teaches most things in Turkish. She rarely explains in English. Linguistically, the couple is the exact opposite of each other. “I speak English, not only to my kids, but all children in the community. Sometimes, they call me to speak to the kids. College or K-12, it doesn’t matter. I speak English, especially if it is a religious conversation. They like it more, even calling me ‘cool big brother.’”

The Yilmaz family’s children were initially attending the local public school. Once Selim finished seventh grade, the family decided to send him to an Islamic school in another state. The school is owned by the Pakistani Muslim community, but the principal and a few teachers are from the Gülen Movement. On talking with some Movement members, I learned that some families had been sending their children to Movement-affiliated cultural centers where they provide both religious and secular education. They call this education “homeschool.” In each major city in the United States, there are homeschools run by the Movement, and they accept both female and male students although the instruction is not coed. They mostly serve eighth graders. When I asked why 8th graders were the main target, one respondent said they spiritually prepare them for the difficult high school years. The Movement members are aware of the importance of good grades and strong academic skills in high school; thus, most of them exclusively limit this opportunity to eighth graders. The homeschools have recently been popular within the Movement. Although I have never observed a Movement-related homeschool, it might be functioning as the venue for *controlled exposure*, a term Melih used in our interview (see Chapter Two). This term points to the

condition of children who attend educational institutions affiliated with the Movement. Members send their children to these places with full confidence because they are sure that their children will be taken care of in the best way.

The Yilmaz family's case is different from the aforementioned homeschooling experience. Whereas Movement-affiliated homeschools are usually located in places like Movement-owned cultural centers, Murat's son went to an Islamic school and stayed in a Movement-owned single family house they call a "dormitory." After consulting with their children, Maryam and Murat decided to send their son to that Islamic school in the neighboring state. That move came as a surprise to me because it was something I did not expect from Murat after several months of rapport with him. So, I asked what changed his mind.

"There are several reasons behind this decision, my friend. First, the request came from Selim. If he hadn't wanted to go, we would have never sent him by force. He wanted to go because his best friends were going there. He liked the idea of sharing a house with his best friends. Maryam and I thought that he would learn how to be a responsible person by sharing responsibility under the same roof. So far, we have always been the helper of our children and they have been completely dependent on us. Doing laundry, cooking, being tidy etc. would help him learn to be an organized person. They will also teach Islam at school and home. When he is with us, he spends most of his time in front of the computer screen. We have been told that they would limit their screen time and would only allow them to use their cell phones a couple of days a week with some restrictions. So, we liked the idea of a disciplined life. Also, Maryam has been busy with her business and I have my own fair share of hectic tempo. Maryam hasn't been feeling happy for not dedicating enough time for Selim. I guess this homeschool will

alleviate some of the guilt and burden from us,” Murat said. These reasons behind outsourcing the religious education of Selim were very similar to those of others in the Turkish community I interviewed.

The language spoken in the Yilmaz home varies. The couple almost exclusively speaks Turkish with each other. The children generally speak English with each other, but when they are around their parents, they speak a language that can be described as *Turkish* in which the speakers engage in a code switching between the two languages (Lambert 2018). Pelin playfully calls this *Tinglish*. *Turkish* happens in two ways. In the first version, speakers go back and forth between the two languages. In the second one, they add Turkish words while speaking English, or vice versa. The children’s Turkish is sufficient for daily use, but they are unable to express themselves fully in Turkish if they need to use some advanced vocabulary. They replace difficult Turkish words with their equivalent in English. As for Maryam and Murat, they speak mostly Turkish with the children, but they prefer both Turkish and English in specific situations—which include explaining a religious concept, clarifying an important point, or even admonishing children. Thanks to his background and academic career, Murat’s English is considerably better than Maryam’s. “I go with English if I sense that the children didn’t get the point I am trying to make,” said Murat. This is similar to the statement by Zafer, one of the interview respondents, and a few others who said they prefer English when they try to explain or underline something (Chapter Two).

“Children sometimes quickly forget the Turkish words they learned in early years. There is an excellent anecdote that proves my point. When Selim was around three years old, he would call the United States flag ‘the flag of the planets’ (*gezegenler bayrağı*) in Turkish. When he was a first grader, he came home one day and said ‘Dad, they

discovered a new *planet*.' They said the entire sentence in Turkish except for the word 'planet' because he couldn't remember the Turkish word (*gezegen*) for it. That was a *eureka* moment for me. Planet is a word you don't use a lot in daily language, and he must probably have read in his science textbook at school. This example shows how quickly their English fluency evolves and replaces their Turkish." As evident from this and similar anecdotes, Murat is a staunch defender of English. He does not hate Turkish, but he finds it unnecessary when it comes to teaching Islam.

Similar to the other examples I encountered in my interviews, The Yilmaz family has started to outsource children's religious education as their kids grow up. As we will see below, Selim has been sent to an Islamic school in another state. Meanwhile, Pelin is taking both Math and character education classes online, and the package includes Islamic education as well. She is accompanied by one of her best friends in these online classes, and the families share the instructor fee. Their teacher is from Turkey and from the Gülen Movement. (He has recently been fired from his teaching job and is currently unemployed.) Pelin is also taking a Qur'an tutorial from another instructor in Canada. These tutorials occur several days a week, although she thinks it is too much for her.

Maryam and Murat are conflicted about this tutorial. While the former is in favor of it, Murat wants his daughter to take fewer classes. "I don't want her to get bored or fed up with it. She needs to believe the necessity of it by herself," Murat says. Maryam disagrees. "In this young age, she might not be aware of the importance of learning the Qur'an. That is why I am pushing her to attend these tutorials." Murat is afraid that this push could lead to potential exasperation. "I don't want my children, in this case my daughter, to hate certain Islamic rituals just because we forced them to. They need to believe the necessity of it. For example, once my son returns from homeschooling this

summer, I will not even tell him to perform his daily prayers. I will just tell him, ‘I’m praying and feel free to join me if you want.’ As you know, prayers in groups or congregations are more rewarding in Islam. That will be my only motivation.” We see here that Murat gives more freedom and agency to his children, whereas Maryam believes that certain things need to be instilled in children at an early age so that they become like second nature.

Ramadan is a time during which Muslims become more spiritual. I have observed two Ramadans with the Yilmaz family. The first one featured some home decorations—including some inside illumination, Ramadan-themed decorations located on top of the fireplace, and some balloons. In the second year, Ramadan decorations were minimal. Selim was not at home most of the Ramadan, and the family was busy. Similar to Weberian *routinization of charisma* (Weber 1992), the Yilmaz family, along with some other ones I spoke with went through a *routinization of religious fervor*. Families starting in high fervor witnessed the decline in their religious fervor over time. Ramadan was a proper example of this. During the COVID-19 pandemic, when children were home, the family had more time for decoration and celebration. Once the restrictions were lifted and children started to take in-person classes, the spiritual level of the entire family considerably dropped. Selim, spending most of his Ramadan in his homeschool, experienced the most spirituality in the family. During the second Ramadan, Pelin tried to fast all day, and she did it five or six times.

In the first Ramadan I observed them, they watched *Little Mosque on the Prairie*, a Canadian sitcom, during their fast-breaking dinner. The show focuses on a Muslim community in a small town in Canada, and it tells stories about their daily interactions in a funny way. It was originally broadcast on Canada’s CBC, but they watched it on the

YouTube channel of its producer. “We started the show on the first day of Ramadan and we watched at least two or three episodes every night during *iftar* dinner,” Murat said. “We finished all six seasons in the month of Ramadan. I think the show helped kids understand what kind of lives Muslims live in the West and improved their association with the Muslim identity. My daughter’s favorite character was Rayyan Homuidi, a female Muslim doctor with some feminist views, but she wears a *hijab*. I am glad she emulates an outspoken Muslim woman who is proud of her identity.” After some episodes, Selim and Maryam were impersonating some of the characters of the show. Their favorite impersonation was Baber Siddiqui, who is the most conservative member of the Muslim community. The dearth of TV shows focusing on Muslim-Americans seems to be the main reason the Yilmaz family liked this show. They were able to identify themselves with it. “We sometimes would comment about something in the show after watching it. I think they realized that there could also be a show about our lives as Muslims,” Maryam added.

For children, the best part of Ramadan is the Eid itself. On the Eid days, Murat wakes his children up with a Turkish pop song called “Today is Eid.” The song is not religious, but the children, I was told, woke up to this song every Eid since they were very young. The family gets ready to head for the Eid prayer at the cultural center. Children are particularly looking forward to the Eid because they will collect money (Eid allowance) from the congregation after the prayer. It has become a tradition of the Gülen Movement in America to give money to children right after the prayer. Adults try to make everyone happy, so they hand out one-dollar bills to each kid. Normally, in Turkey, only the close relatives of a child give them money, but in the absence of

relatives in the United States, people try to function like a relative for everyone's child. The community in a Durkheimian-way functions like a family.

Pelin and Selim's expectations are higher than a dollar bill, at least around fifty dollars from each parent, when it comes to Eid allowance. For many parents, this tradition makes up for the Christmas gift exchange tradition of American culture. Most Turkish families see the Eid allowance as an alternative to Christmas gifts. "I remember boasting about the amount of money we give to our children. I would tell them, 'You see American kids just get a couple of Christmas gifts, but how much are they worth? You guys collected \$150 each at the cultural center. We also gave you extra on top of that.' They all agreed on my statement (laughs)," recalls Maryam. In addition to the money collected at the cultural center and given by a child's own family, children also receive money when their parents visit another family or get visited in their home. The guest parents give money to the child(ren) of the host family and vice versa. I noticed some parents tend to give more than a dollar, particularly if they are the children of their closest friends.

The community is doing their best to instill the love for Eid and good memories in children similar to good Christmas or Passover memories. The Yilmaz family has adopted traditions along the same lines. "Before the shutdown of their stores, I would take my children to Toys R Us on the first day of every Eid and they would spend from the Eid money they had collected. We would never skip this tradition. Even after the shutdown, children still fondly remember those memories. Selim mostly would get legos, and Pelin would choose anything but dolls. When Toys R Us was shut down, I felt I had to find something else to make the first day of the Eid memorable for the children. I found this indoor karting place. At first, I wasn't sure if Pelin would enjoy it, but she

loved it. So, we started a new tradition,” Murat said. Maryam has never accompanied these toy store or indoor karting trips. “I wanted to make sure the kids establish a bond with their father through these religious holidays,” Maryam said. The couple engages in a division of labor in terms of religious socialization efforts. Maryam takes care of the early socialization through basic knowledge and rituals. Murat then takes over with the group rituals and memories. In the meantime, Maryam continues to nurture and encourage the children with her spirituality. (Religious socialization starts in Turkish and continues in English once children go to school). Murat also adds an interfaith dimension and spiritual diversity to widen their intellectual knowledge about other faith traditions.

Religious socialization also takes place through visiting and interacting with other friends. Families arrange playdates or sleepovers for their children. Some playdates are purposefully arranged by mothers so that they could teach something religious or moral during these gatherings. “I have been talking to my friends lately to organize a playdate for our daughters. This weekend, we will initiate the first one. The plan is to meet at someone’s home every other Saturday. We mothers were concerned that we couldn’t provide enough spiritual guidance to our daughters. Also, their socialization skills are lacking because they don’t have any close relatives like aunts, uncles, etc.,” Maryam said.

After this conversation, Pelin’s mother and the mothers of her best friends met three or four times, each time at a different home. Other than playing time, on each occasion, mothers took turns to talk about an Islamic issue—which included belief in God, some hadith of the Prophet, religious stories, and parables for character building. When it was Maryam’s turn, she asked her husband whether he could be of any help. He

agreed and handed out one character-building book to each child and each one of the children summarized the book they read. Murat's entire activity, the book summaries, the group conversation, and the question-answer parts were all done in English. The girls were not overly enthusiastic during the activity, but they still got the job done. "I didn't want to read a book and say something didactic because I wanted to turn this activity into an interactive one. When parents go didactic, kids get bored. They don't always like to be preached. They need to find out certain patterns by themselves," commented Murat.

"We prioritized moral values. We would determine a topic like honesty and the host lady would tell the children about its importance. But we first started the program with a prayer. Everyone silently would pray to God and not reveal the details of their prayers. One host lady organized a cooking class, another one did some arts and crafts. There was also free time for playing," added Maryam, outlining the details of the program. "Mothers are sometimes having a hard time telling their children about Islamic and moral values. But when children hear from another person, they tend to listen more." Initially, everyone volunteered to talk about one theme or topic. Thus, when it was their turn, they would talk about that topic. In one of the activities, Pelin and her friends became Muslim pilgrims through a simulation. One parent taught all the main rituals related to pilgrimage. Girls imitated how a pilgrim would do a certain ritual, and they completed an entire simulation. "This hands-on simulation was more effective than theoretical knowledge," Maryam commented.

These initial playdates could not be continued for long because these families live far from each other. Hence, Maryam focused on the families who lived relatively closer than the previous ones. Of course, Pelin had the last word in the decision-making

process because she did not want to go on a playdate with the girls she disliked. That is why her mother had to hang out with the women whose daughters were Pelin's favorite friends. In addition to playdates, there were several sleepovers arranged for both Pelin and Selim. Most of these sleepovers, if taking place at the Yilmaz family's home, did not include much of religious socialization. Sometimes, children, especially boys, joined Murat when he stood up for the evening prayer, but no preaching or *halaqa* took place after the prayer.

I asked Maryam whether these recent playdates were the first of their kind. "Of course not. Since their toddler days, I have exerted a lot of effort for my children's religious education. I had some volunteering duties within the Movement, but I somehow found time to teach them something about our religion. We used to come together with a couple of friends and organize homeschool activities at the cultural center. The content was mostly moral and religious. We would read books, teach Islam through puppet shows and games. When I think back now, I had a serious ambition to educate my kids."

While Maryam takes care of the spiritual sides of their children, Murat caters to their minds. One day Selim, on their way to Friday prayer, asked his father "Is it true that you are out of Islam if you don't attend Friday prayers unexcused three weeks in a row?" Murat asked, "Where did you hear it, at your homeschool?" "Yes." "I don't know, Allah knows. It is mentioned in some hadith, but Prophet Muhammad didn't say that person would be out of Islam. He just said they might carry one attribute of the hypocrites, but again just possessing one attribute doesn't make you an unbeliever," replied Murat. Selim nodded his head and approved of this answer. Later, after we dropped off Selim, Murat told me that he combats some of the misinterpretations in

Islam. “There are some messed up beliefs among Muslims and most of them have no scientific basis. For example, many Turks believe that non-Muslim men are not jealous of their wives because they eat pork and pig is an animal who is not jealous of his female. Of course, this is complete BS, but many people buy this argument.” I asked him where such beliefs might have stemmed from. “There could be several reasons. For example, regarding the issue of eating pork and not being able to be jealous of your wife, I guess it stems from the prohibition of pork products. Islam, similar to Judaism, prohibits eating pork, but it never talks about this jealousy issue. So, it must have been a later addition to discourage Muslims or to denigrate pork-eating non-Muslims. You must also have noticed the sexism or male perspective here. They don’t say ‘women won’t be jealous of their husbands,’ but rather ‘men won’t be jealous of their wives.’ Who knows if they had found out that women won’t be jealous of their husbands, they wouldn’t have cared about it, I guess.” Murat obviously is not particularly concerned about maintain a peaceful Muslim image, rather he rather tries to correct any belief he deems mistaken.

The biggest change with the Yilmaz family was sending their son to Islamic school. I had a chance to visit Selim’s school and the dormitory where he stayed. Selim’s dormitory, rented by the school, was a single family house. There were four bunk beds, two in each bedroom, for students. There were also two mentors of college age along with a single teacher from the Islamic school. Murat told me there were initially eight students, but one student left. All told, around 10 people were staying there most of the year. One of the mentors, in a small van provided by the school, gave a ride to students from home to school and vice versa every school day. They would also use the same van when they had a field trip or even a short trip to a grocery store. Their home had a daily

schedule for after-school hours during the weekdays and for the entire day on the weekends. The schedule included time praying together, reading hours (which included personal Qur'an practice and reading an Islamic book), dinner, study hours, and free time.

This house looked similar to the ones some of my interview respondents described when they talked about their own experiences of staying at a Movement-affiliated house (Chapter Two). At the end of each semester, they issued a "dormitory report card," which was divided into sections. The first section included Qur'an chapters expected to be memorized, books expected to read, and prayers expected to memorize. There were checkmarks for the ones he completed. Underneath this part, there was a list of social activities done over the year. The list featured barbecuing (five times), bowling (three times), laser tag (three times), cinema, arcade, swimming, shopping mall, kayaking, hiking, go karting, and visiting a food festival. This list was followed by another one that included the topics of the speeches mentors made throughout the year. The topics included intention, knowledge, pillars of Islam and faith, watching the tongue, between the lines, the right words, ignorance, Prophet Ibrahim (Abraham) as a teenager, and the last day and resurrection. The list continued further covering such things as beneficial advice to Muslim children; what do I achieve by reading Quran?; I could never be like them anyway (the companions of Prophet Muhammad); making changes; feelings, words, and the mess they can make, youth: impulsiveness, temptation, and responsibility; forgotten manners; happiness, fun, and pleasure; walk with purpose. This list also had some weighty topics, such as a look in the mirror; growing up in America; mental prison; how we lose our Iman; and keeping faith during faithless time. This listing is not very clear based on the titles, but the mentors seem to

have covered foundational issues about Islam, issues of morality, teenager issues, and issues related to growing up in the United States. Finally, the report card ends with the comments of the mentor about Selim's behaviors, cleanliness, prayers, punctuality, and self-responsibility.

The Islamic school Selim attended is located in a small conservative town, something unusual for an Islamic school, which was founded by a group of Pakistani Muslim medical professionals. While Selim's homeschool experience was geared toward eighth graders, the school actually serves K-12 students. In addition to Selim, there were at least four or five eighth graders from the same town, including some girls. I was told that the girls were also staying at another single family house with their mentors. There was another dormitory on school grounds reserved for high school students. The school features a regular K-12 curriculum with science, math, and other classes as well as Qur'an, Arabic, and Islamic history.

Murat invited me to Selim's homeschool graduation. After a two-hour drive, we arrived at the venue rented for the graduation. It was a modest place with a simple stage that was decorated, along with some tables and chairs. By the time we went there, men and women, mostly parents and some teachers, were sitting separately. I am not sure whether the seating arrangement was intended that way or whether people simply preferred to sit like this. But there was one thing of which I was and that was the arrangement of the graduates. Both fifth and eighth grade girls and boys sat separately across each from other, each on one side of the room. Enjoying defying such arrangements, Murat found an empty table and sat with his wife and daughter. Emboldened by their move, I joined them. "I don't like such arbitrary arrangements," Murat immediately chimed in. "Once someone decides to sit with someone other than

their spouse, the others feel they will have to follow the lead even if they don't want to. I would like to share this momentous experience with my family. Why should I sit next to someone I am not necessarily friends or familiar with just because I share the same sex?" Murat then told me that he had a surprise for me, but he did not reveal anything.

The ceremony started with the Qur'an recitation; then a PowerPoint with the pictures of eighth-grade girls and boys was shown. The photos were from the houses in which they stayed in and from their classrooms at school. Next, the principal showed an introductory video about the school. After a brief speech, he invited Murat to the stage. That must have been the surprise the Murat mentioned to me. He delivered a speech similar to a college commencement speech, yet in a much lighter tone with plenty of humor. He mainly talked about the importance of having academic curiosity and being a global Muslim citizen, instead of being someone with a missionary and apologetic mindset.

After the graduation ceremony, eight graders were expected to attend a spiritual retreat that would last several days at a lakeside outside the town. Selim went there, but cut it short to join another spiritual retreat, this time in his hometown. The Yilmaz family see these spiritual retreats as an opportunity for their son to meet new people (because students from other states join these retreats) and to improve his socialization skills.

I asked the couple whether they had made a conscious effort in terms of the moral education of their children. "The moral education is always on," Murat said. "You don't have to dedicate a special time. It could come up unexpectedly. For me, they become a good person, a nice role model for their friends and future children is more important than their prayers. Religion regulates the relationship between God and

human beings. Morality, on the other hand, organizes interpersonal relationships. You become who you are as a result of these interactions. You will be known as a good or bad person. I keep telling my children the same thing. ‘If you hurt other people, if you become mean, if you don’t help anyone, or if you don’t make any difference, then Allah doesn’t need your prayers.’” Echoing her husband’s views, Maryam gave a more recent example. “You must have heard about the corruption the Erdoğan government has been swarmed with. Everybody knows they are corrupt. Some people in Turkey say that ‘if these guys are Muslim, then we are not.’ They caused people to get alienated to religion. They distorted the good and honest Muslim image.” “Children need to see their parents as good role models. If we promise them something, we keep our promise or we remind each other to keep it. We also emphasize to be truthful at all times. So, to answer your question, yes, we do have a conscious effort to help our kids be ethical, but we do not put it in a schedule. Every interaction could be an opportunity to teach a moral lesson.” Maryam then added, “But, we also remind our children that we are not perfect and they should warn us if we commit an error and they do!”

I also asked Maryam and Murat about their mutual relationship in terms of spirituality and morality. “We have intellectually and spiritually nurtured each other as a couple over the years,” Murat said. “Maryam’s spirituality and communication with other people really inspire me. She has a deep faith in God although she doesn’t always display her religiosity. In the community, she is a people person. I am not that much loved because I openly voice my disagreements. Kind of pain-in-the-ass situation...” When I asked Maryam whether Murat had had any influence on her, she talked about his intellectual capacity. “He knows a lot about many things. His religious knowledge is deeper, but he refuses to show it to others. He wants to experience his spirituality in

solitary. I like his ambition to learn new things. We also keep each other in check and accountable regarding ethical behaviors.”

When I asked Maryam whether her religiosity was in decline and the reason for such decline (if any), she said, “Yes, partly. I don’t know the main reason, maybe the hectic life tempo. I am not reading the Qur’an as much as I used to.” Murat, as I expected based on my observations, reported a similar decline, yet considerably sharper than Maryam’s. “I have been through some paradigm shifts for sure. A lot of things have changed for me. Maybe the number of daily prayers I perform is still the same, but my approach to the prayers, other rituals, and to the entire Islamic theology has changed.” I asked for further explanation. “This is not easy to summarize,” he said. “I have been reading, listening, doing research, and so many other things. Some things in Islam might not be the exact same way we were taught. Of course, in addition to theology, I have seen the practices of many Muslims. Also, I have seen the spiritual lives of many non-Muslims. Meeting people of other cultures and faiths was the first groundbreaking thing for me. In the past, I thought only the Muslims would go to Heaven, but now it has changed for me. I moved from being exclusivist to pluralist. Salvation is for everyone.”

I asked Murat whether the members of the Gülen Movement think the same way. “I can’t speak on behalf of the entire community, but I know many around me. More and more members now accept a pluralistic approach. I think this is significant because such mentality is reflected in their religious socialization practices. Those who accept other people’s salvation become more tolerant. They join the interfaith and intercultural gatherings more. They teach such things like respect to diversity.” Murat’s comments mark a shift for the first generation Turkish Muslim immigrants, from a monolithic

society where Islam is the only religion in the public space to a pluralistic one where a number of faith traditions are located along the spectrum.

This sort of inclusivist approach is also adopted by Maryam in a different way. “I can’t judge if someone goes to Heaven or Hell. We don’t know. Only Allah knows. There are so many non-Muslims with great character. I think Allah will forgive most of them.” I have been to some of the WhatsApp groups Murat has been part of. Murat has been defending the same arguments to other members of the Movement as well. He went into several hot arguments with those he called “hopeless apologetics.”

Social Life, Muslim Identity, and Hot Topic Issues

The Yilmaz family’s social life is another avenue for the religious and moral socialization of their children. When choosing the families with whom they would hang out, they basically apply three criteria: the families who are close to their worldview, the ones whose daughters are similar to Pelin’s age, and the ones whose sons are similar to Selim’s age. This is a common practice with many of the Turkish families I spoke with. Being members of the Gülen Movement, most of these families hang out with other ones from the Movement. The Yilmaz family has some Muslim American and non-Muslim American friends, as well thanks to the intrafaith and interfaith gatherings of which they have become a part. “Due to the pandemic, we can’t visit anyone, nor are we able to host any family. It is a boring time period, but we still maintain closer ties with each other,” he said during the earlier days of the pandemic. But still, the majority of their friends are from the Movement. Their gatherings feature breakfasts, dinners, picnics, after dinner teatime, and Eid visits. In most cases, more than one family is invited to the occasion. The seating arrangement is done depending on the host family’s preference. Some

families make women and men sit separately—a practice called *haremlik selamlık* in Turkish. The Yilmaz family's best friends are usually those who do not prefer sitting separately. But even in those families, during the later hours of the visit, sometimes women and men sit in different rooms depending on how their conversation goes. In some cases, women and men sit together during breakfast or dinner, and then they are separated once it is over. Children usually find their age- and gender-appropriate friends and then hang out together.

The Yilmaz family dines out or they do take-out from various restaurants, although their selection for either option is not wide. They make sure they go halal if their selection is meat. To this end, they ask their friends if they have discovered any new halal restaurant or any restaurant with halal meat option. Once they learned about a burger place and tried it; Murat invited me over to try that burger place, as well. It was a great opportunity to observe their first time experience at a restaurant. The burger place was located at a shopping mall. On their way, Maryam was driving and Murat was checking out the menu. He could not find which items were halal, so they waited until they saw the real menu. At the restaurant, the first thing Murat asked about the menu was the halal portion. The waiter told them that any burger with beef in it was halal. “This was the first time we had been to a burger place as a family,” Murat told me. “We always tried regular Mediterranean or Middle Eastern restaurants. They mostly have wraps, not burgers.” Maryam and Pelin did not like the burger a lot because they thought it was fatty. They never tried that restaurant again, although Murat and Selim were okay about it. This particular burger place was not unanimously frequented by the Turkish patrons.

In terms of dietary selections, the Yilmaz family has been relaxing some of their formerly strict rules. For example, I was told that the children would not eat red M&Ms because Maryam told them that the red ones had red 40. We were once at a supermarket with Murat, Pelin, and Selim. Murat showed them a product in which there was cochineal extract. He told them that this extract was made out of a bug. Then he showed the picture of a cochineal. He told the kids that their mother thought that red 40 was made out of this bug, but it was not. Pelin remembered her mother's old habit. "Yes, I remember, dad. Mom wouldn't let us eat the red ones." Maryam's misinformation kept her children from eating or drinking certain snacks for several years, but Maryam interprets this as a cautionary approach "to be on the safe side."

Vanilla extract was another ingredient this family stayed away from for several years. Murat said he had decided to take the matter into his own hands and sought advice from Caner, a friend of his who is a chemistry professor and member of their book club. After getting the green light from him, he started purchasing the products that contain vanilla extract. "Especially many ice cream brands included the extract in their products," said Murat. Now, the family are no longer worried about vanilla extract, but they are still mindful of any alcohol that is added later on instead of being produced in natural ways. Just like some respondents, the Yilmaz family goes to a luxury steakhouse where only the served lamb is halal. When they are there, they ask the waiters not to marinate the lamb with alcohol.

The Yilmaz family's favorite activity is movie night, which starts with shopping. Sometimes alone, and sometimes with at least one of the children, Murat goes to the nearest grocery store and buys chips, ice cream, and drinks. Children are told to prepare the snack once he is back from shopping. Preparation means putting the snacks in

various bowls and plates. When everyone is ready, they start playing the movie in one of the recently popular streaming venues such as Netflix, Disney+, Hulu, or YouTube TV. Maryam or Murat reminds everyone to say *Bismillah* (in the name of God) before they begin eating, or sometimes, they remind each other how many different snacks they have for themselves and they thank God for His bounties. They dim the lights, reposition the sofas, and play the movie. Needless to say, they mostly watch family-friendly movies. They skip any kissing scene or when a kissing scene comes up, at least one of the parents caution the children by saying “Don’t look!” and the children close their eyes. After a few seconds, Pelin asks, “Is it over?” They say “yes” or “not yet.” If the scene appears to take longer than usual, they fast forward the scene and continue to watch. Both kids are curious about horror movies, but Maryam strictly opposes their request. Murat tries to reconcile the parties. During the first few months of observation, Murat used to advertise the cult horror movie *Child’s Play* a couple of times. This piqued the curiosity of the children despite Maryam’s frequent protests. After several unsuccessful attempts, they were able to watch the movie one night. I was not there for that specific night, but I was told that the children enjoyed the movie and they were not scared a lot. “They were really into that movie. On one of our road trips, we saw a biker who was carrying the same ‘Chucky’ doll from the movie with him. I was frequently joking with the kids that I was planning to buy the same doll from Amazon. I dared them to sleep with that doll one night. Of course, this offer was outright rejected by my wife,” said Murat with a grin on his face.

The overwhelming majority of the shows they watch are in English. Murat told me that they used to watch the movies of Kemal Sunal, a late Turkish actor with comedy movies and *Güldür Güldür*, a weekly comedy program consisting of several skits. The

family particularly likes certain skits that are about a moral issue or government criticism. They are not subscribed to any Turkish satellite network, so, they only watch such skits on their YouTube channel. In her commentary while viewing, Maryam reflects her modest dress approach. One day, they were watching the show and one of the female actors was wearing a mini skirt, but there were leggings underneath. "I like her because she always wears leggings even when she wears a mini skirt." Maryam and Murat watch some of the TV shows without the children because of age appropriateness. "Some shows have lots of nudity and sexuality," Maryam noted. When they watch together, without the children, they skip the kissing or any other sensual scenes.

Murat invited me to several movie nights. Within a year of my observations, they started watching *Shark Tank* with great interest. "Instead of watching something with little or no life lessons, we prefer watching something inspiring," Murat said. As times went on and the children grew up, the rating level of the movies was also going up, so to speak. The last time I joined them, they watched *Arachnophobia*, a thriller from the 1990s. Maryam was busy with an online meeting, so the rest of the crew watched the movie together. They were having their dinner when the movie started. Towards the second half of the movie, Murat asked the kids to pause the movie and do the evening prayer. They paused the movie, performed the prayer, and returned to their seats quickly once the prayer was over. In one scene of the movie, all the wine bottles in the cellar fell on top of the main character and injured him. "You see alcohol is the evil of all things," Murat jokingly said and the kids laughed. "Good one," Pelin noted. Murat was alluding to a common phrase uttered by Turks about the harm of alcoholic drinks. He simultaneously pointed out the forbiddenness of alcohol in Islam. During the movie, Pelin especially commented on the moral stance of the characters. "This is a bad guy, I

hope he dies,” “This is a good one, hope he survives.” Not only does Pelin identify herself with the movie characters, she also gets affected by emotional scenes. “She wants to be a vet and she has a special bond with animals,” Maryam noted. “Her love for animals is off the charts. In a movie, if an animal or a human needs to die or gets harmed, she prefers it to be the human,” Murat added.

He also told me a story that shows the rift between the first and the second generation. “One day our cat gave birth to several kittens and Pelin joyfully shared this good news with her Qur’an teacher, who is now in Canada after living in the United States for almost two years. The teacher said, ‘You should raise human beings instead of cats.’ You must have seen the disappointment in her face. I was also seriously disappointed. First of all, it is not something you should tell a ten-year-old kid. Is this her duty to raise a child? Second, what does having a couple of kittens have to do with raising children? Are they mutually exclusive? Can’t someone do both? Third, why is there so much dislike or ignorance against certain pets in the Muslim community, especially against dogs? Also, why was he in a hurry to say these words without congratulating my daughter first? Some of the deeply seated prejudices in the Turkish community are incurable.” The pet issue is another one that has been changing the attitudes of the people in the Movement. Those who have never taken care of a cat, for example, back in Turkey are starting to adopt a cat in the United States. The requests mostly come from children. As for the Yilmaz family, Maryam and Murat did not resist having a cat when their children asked for one. “We found someone on Nextdoor who was looking for an owner to adopt one of her kittens and we immediately fell in love with the one we got later,” Murat said. The family distributed all the kittens, exclusively to the Turkish families.

Maryam and Murat are extra careful that their children be proud of their Muslim identity or at least not be embarrassed by it. “We initially had some problems with that,” Maryam said. “Selim did not want to be seen with me when he was in elementary school. He was probably kind of embarrassed by my headscarf.” I was curious about what they did to remedy the situation. “We spoke to him, saying that he shouldn’t be ashamed of his parents or his religion. Maybe he was scared that some of his classmates would say something to him about me.” I asked how they noticed this problem. “We would say goodbye to our son before he got on the school bus, but he started telling me, ‘Mom, you don’t have to come, dad can say bye.’ I didn’t initially care, but this repeated several times unfortunately. Nowadays, especially after attending the Islamic school, he doesn’t have any problem with me around him.”

During one of our casual conversations, Murat brought up the same issue “Here is the thing. You already know about the headscarf issue, but some children are embarrassed of their parents because of the language barrier because at least one of their parents, mostly moms, can’t speak fluent English. Therefore, children are reluctant to call their parents to school activities such as volunteering, reading stories, etc. Dads are usually busy and moms’ English is not fluent enough. My wife’s English is good, but she lacks some self-confidence. So, I took matters into my own hands. I signed up for an activity called *Mystery Reader*, in which parents come to the classroom and read a book or two of their choice. I was the third parent on the list and my daughter had no clue about me being the mystery reader. When it was my turn for the third week, the teacher emailed and gave me the instructions. I didn’t want to take Islamic children’s books we used to read, but I didn’t want to take any regular books, either. So, I decided to take these two books. The first one was about a Muslim girl who is bullied by some

classmates due to her headscarf but gets the support of other students. I thought this book would cater to my daughter although she doesn't wear a headscarf yet. The second book was written by a Muslim author, but it was about the environment we pollute. Animals come together and complain to an angel about the destruction human beings have done on Earth. Anyway, I went to the classroom and my daughter was super surprised to see me. She really didn't expect it at all. But she was so happy. Her teacher had arranged two chairs and she made me and my daughter sit on these chairs while the other kids were on the carpet. Since, you know, I am a college professor, I know how to teach and interact with students in a classroom. I read the books with some funny reading tones, asked questions to the kids, and cracked a couple of jokes. It was a near perfect day, I can definitely say. But what matters was the aftermath. I finished my part, went back home and that afternoon, when my daughter came from school, she hugged me so tightly that I don't remember any other time she would hug me that tight. She was clearly proud of me. She was able to show off to her classmates and she told me she had received many compliments after I was gone."

Murat told me that he had never participated in the traditional *halaqas* (religious conversations) for the last few years. A *sohbet* (Turkish word for *halaqa*) is an important occasion to maintain spiritual awareness. "I don't exactly remember when was the last time I joined one," Murat said. I asked him the reason. "Because every one of them is a repetition of the previous one. In the Movement, there are two main texts members follow. The books of Said Nursi and Fethullah Gülen. Almost all stories, examples, parables, etc. are taken from these books. In a classical *sohbet*, there is a *sohbet abisi* [the person who does the main talk in a *sohbet* and leads the conversation] and he mostly reads from Nursi's or Gülen's books and makes interpretations. The

others listen to him. If they have any questions, they ask them in the end. Recently, the Movement has been trying to turn these meetings into dialogues, which means, they strive to get the input of the other participants. But at the end of the day, you just read from two similar sources and talk about more or less the same things. There is even a Sufi group of the Movement intended for the English-speaking people and non-Muslims also join that group and the organizer just reads from Gülen's *Sufism* book and Nursi's various books. These monolithic and tedious gatherings don't appeal to me. On top of that, people have started to add political commentary to these texts, especially after the coup attempt in Turkey."

I asked what kind of political commentary people were making. "They talk about how bad the Erdoğan government is and how terribly they are treating the members of the Movement, etc. I agree with these statements but I go there to hear something spiritual, not political. Besides, after a while, everything is on a loop. What is worse, sometimes some elders of the Movement come to our town and some of them just prophesize things without any factual basis." "What kind of prophecies have you heard so far?" "First of all, they start the talk with the premise that the Movement is innocent and has never committed any error. God is on our side. People who are loved by God went through difficult trials and tribulations. Their stories are mentioned in the Qur'an. That is why, a lot of innocent people from the Movement have been jailed or fired from their jobs. If we are patient, everything is going to be alright. The government or people who will replace this government will eventually apologize to our people. Honestly, I don't believe this kind of BS because the image of the Movement in Turkey is all-time bottom low. Whether this is fair or not, it is another discussion, but if you ask an average Turk what they hate most, they will put the Gülen Movement and PKK (Kurdish

terrorist organization) at the top of their lists. This smear campaign about the Movement has been going on since 2013. So, it is unrealistic to change this image dramatically. This stigma will stay with the Movement members for a long time unless they change their affiliation. Yet, the Movement elders keep misleading those who listen to them.”

At this point, I asked Murat what bad could arise from injecting some hope to people. “Hope is good, I understand, but unrealistic hope has some bad consequences. Because of this unrealistic hope, many newcomers cannot entirely integrate to their communities or the larger American society. They don’t envision any long-term plans because they seriously believe they will return one day. The only good news is that more and more people are being disillusioned. As time passes, they realize nothing is actually changing in Turkey. A few years ago, I was hearing some esoteric and apocalyptic predictions. For example, such and such person dreamed that in three years everything will be alright and we are all going to be allowed to return to Turkey. When I first heard this claim from a friend, I immediately told him this would be impossible. I was even ready to bet against this claim.” I asked him why he thought people came up with such interesting claims. “People are not ready to give up. They would like to be hopeful, but at the same time they want to keep the Movement together. They look for some evidence or a piece of branch they want to hold on. Anyway, that’s why I don’t join any of these *sohbets* anymore. There is nothing I have never heard in those gatherings. They don’t produce something new; they don’t say something original.”

With one of his best friends, Murat founded a book club he named “Free Thinkers.” By the time I started hanging out with Murat, the club was already celebrating its first anniversary. Except for a hiatus during the first few months of the

pandemic, the book club regularly meets every other week. The members of the book club were selected so that they could seamlessly fit into the club. The members also happen to be among Murat's best friends. The group currently has five members including Murat; Osman, a college student; Oguz, the co-founder of the group; Naci, a business associate of Oguz and Murat's friend; and Caner, a chemistry professor. When the group was first formed, I was told that there were two more members, but one of them moved to another town and the other one decided to stay away during the pandemic and stopped coming to the meetings.

Their bi-weekly meetings feature the discussion of the book chapter they assign. They generally spend two or three meetings on a book. Their selections include fields like religion, psychology, history, sociology, economy, mysticism, and political science. The gatherings start with some daily talk until everyone arrives. Once the quorum is present, which is basically everyone, someone initiates the gathering with usually the same questions: "All right, folks, how did you find the book?" or "How was Chapter 1?" This question actually serves as the entry point to the discussion session. Everyone chimes in and says something about a specific chapter or the book in general. During the first year I attended, they would discuss the book for the first hour or so. Then, during the second hour, they would talk about philosophical and metaphysical issues. The second part usually lasts until midnight, and the participants seem to enjoy the second part more than the first one. They would mix the philosophical discussions with plenty of jokes, crude humor, and funny commentary. This second (and philosophical) part of the meeting would also include discussions of spirituality, mysticism, and Eastern religions—particularly Buddhism. Caner was the one who initiated the first question at the start of the second part. Since he had a long commute to the college at which he

worked, he would ask about something he had heard on a podcast during his drive. His single question would be sufficient to open a conversation that would last several hours. “The depths we would go in these conversations are unimaginable. Nothing is beyond limits. We question everything from our own existence to the existence of God,” noted Murat.

Some of the books they read in the club were *The First Muslim* by Lesley Hazleton, *Why Nations Fail* by Daron Acemoglu, *IGen* by Jean Twenge, *Atomic Habits* by James Clear, and *The Righteous Mind* by Jonathan Haidt. They also read some articles and book chapters from various newspapers, websites, and magazines. Except for a book about Sufism, all the texts were in English, but their discussions were all in Turkish. In the club’s first year, women, the wives of the married ones, were also participating in their discussions if they wanted to do so. Later, club members changed their meeting place and decided to meet in the basement of Oguz and Naci. These basement meetings became men-only, although there was no deliberate exclusion of women. Over time, the length of the book discussions was shortened and the length of the philosophical discussions increased. Also, the group started to meet at some restaurants, including some non-halal ones, after COVID-19-related restrictions were lifted.

The philosophical part of the gatherings featured a number of different topics ranging from the meaning of life to marginal religions. One recurring topic of the meetings was how to raise children in America. Group members are generally concerned about the social and spiritual life of their children. This reflects a general pattern in the Movement. While social life seems innocuous, the members of the Movement are worried about several things including dating, LGBTQ issues, and mingling with non-

Muslims. The LGBTQ issue is a noteworthy one because most of the Movement members I spoke to did not want their children to be friends with people from the LGBTQ community because these people encourage the “normalization” of homosexuality. “Especially the women I have been around uttered sentences like ‘May God protect our children from these things.’ There is plenty of ignorance in the community about this topic. Some folks seriously think that if you are around such people, you will act like them, treating homosexuality like a contagious disease,” Murat commented.

Murat has been a fierce critic of the Movement, although he still volunteers in some interfaith dialogue activities. At the beginning of my research, he was more active, but his commitment slowed down after the Movement brought another person to be in charge of the interfaith dialogue activities. “I don’t like how some people approach interfaith dialogue activities in the Movement. They act like missionaries although they don’t voice it explicitly.” I asked how he knew. “I know because they pray for their guidance, or finding the true path of God, which is Islam. So, they argue that salvation is only possible through Islam.” I asked again whether he thought the same way or not. “Not exactly. Of course, I am Muslim and this is the path I follow, but I don’t think it is the only path. I see this like various ice cream flavors. Everyone has a favorite flavor. Just because I like, let’s say, strawberry ice cream, I can’t claim that the other flavors are tasteless or useless.”

At this point, I wanted to get more out of him, so I asked some theological questions based on my Islamic knowledge. For example, I asked about a Qur’anic verse which says the only valid religion in the sight of God is Islam. “Qur’an uses the term ‘Islam’ in two meanings. I call these ‘Islam in capital i’ and ‘Islam in lowercase i.’ The

former is the Islam we know that has been around for more than 1400 years. 'Islam in lowercase' is 'the religion' that has been around since the first human being. God calls most of the prophets in the Qur'an as Muslims. That means these prophets are seen as the representatives of lowercase Islam. That is why there is salvation for everyone as they believe in God. This perspective has been adopted by more and more people around me. In fact, I like making friends who share my ideas. I don't like the holier-than-thou approach with so much diversity around us. Consider this: The largest faith in the world is Christianity followed by Islam. Only 30 percent of the world population is Christian and 25 percent is Muslim. So, if you are a Christian or a Muslim and you believe that your faith is the only one that will lead you salvation, then you condemn the remaining 70-75 percent of the humanity to hell. If God is merciful as we know, I don't think he will send the majority of humans to a bad place."

I asked Murat where this so-called superiority complex among the Movement members was coming from. "I think it is two... no, even three-fold process. The first one comes from religion. Similar to Christians, many Muslims genuinely think that their religion is the ultimate one. That is why, there are plenty of pejorative words in Turkish that describe non-Muslims. The second one comes from Turkishness. We Turks have inexplicable ethnic and national pride. It is mostly related to the peak period of the Ottoman Empire. You must have heard 'we used to be a superpower' type of bragging a lot. And the third one is about being a member of the Movement. Many movement members I know believe that Allah specifically chose them to be in the Movement. It is like a lottery luck that strikes only a few selected. They also believe that their version of Islam is the best. Also, many Movement members believe that Fethullah Gülen is a person with a special mission by God. Think about it. You are a Turkish-Muslim and you

live the best possible version of Islam and the person you follow is a chosen one. Who else can be better than you?”

Murat’s genuine words resonated with me during my interviews (Chapter Two). Some respondents are grateful to God that He placed them inside the Movement. This looks like the 21st century version of the Protestant ethic Weber (1992) used to draw upon. In the older version, the Calvinists were not sure whether they were among the few elected. In the contemporary version, Gülen Movement members already know that they are among the few elected and they are grateful for that. But it comes with a caveat according to Murat. “They believe they are in that ‘blessed’ circle, but there is no guarantee they will stay there forever. That is why they try to serve Allah by serving other humans.” It is interesting that the term “Muslim Calvinists” was used by a Turkish columnist in 2006 when the Movement was experiencing its heyday (Akyol 2006). By this term, the author meant the businesspeople associated with the Gülen Movement.

Maryam told me this story when we were on our way to Selim’s graduation. “My best friend and I went to these American ladies that we know from the interfaith gathering. They belong to the Baptist church not far from our home. Anyway, one of the ladies went to Turkey a couple of weeks ago and invited us to share her memories. When we went to her home, she had a great decoration with a Turkey theme, even the napkins were made of the Turkish flag. We really felt honored. Deep into the conversation, the friend of the host told us that she loves us very much, but in order for us to go to Heaven we need to accept Jesus as our savior. She repeated the same thing a couple of times in different sentences, but it was an exasperating experience.” I asked Maryam how she felt for the efforts of proselytization. “I felt offended because it is humiliating to be seen as someone bound for Hell.” At that moment, Murat interrupted his wife. “But think about

it, honey. Many Muslims I know have done the same thing. Even us, in our earlier years in America, must have done something similar, right?” “You are right. We are not totally innocent, either. We probably did similar things that caused people to go away or break their friendship with us.” At this point, Murat turned to me. “That is what bothers me a lot regarding the interfaith dialogue gatherings, remember I told you probably a couple of months ago? A lot of people are joining these events to propagate their own faith and proselytize other participants. That is a big issue in our Movement. Most volunteers perceive non-Muslims as ones who need to be spiritually guided. I think this is the manifestation of the superiority complex.”

Murat’s son does not immediately buy the “we-are-the-best” argument. One day, Murat, Selim, and I were on our way to Friday prayer. “How do we know that Islam is the best religion?” Selim asked his father. “We don’t. Do your own research, take a look at some other major religions. Islam comes the most logical to me because of the simple faith. We also do not divinize Jesus or Muhammad. We only pray to Allah. Also, nobody proved that the Qur’an was written by a human being. But again, do your own research,” Murat said. This conversation seemed to give Selim some relief. I am not sure if he was looking for approval or confirmation. Murat did not put other faiths out of the equation, but he explained his own preference with his own logic. He did not act like an apologist, either.

During my observations, I asked more questions about the Movement itself, such as why the members were calling the Gülen Movement *Hizmet* which is translated as “service.” Murat responded, “That is complicated. On the one hand, the Movement used to have schools, dormitories, media outlets, and hospitals in Turkey. All of these organizations were shut down after the coup attempt. Now, they have some schools,

dialogue organizations, and cultural centers in many countries. They want to elevate the name of Allah and Prophet Muhammad in the world. They present themselves as non-violent and peaceful Muslims, something pretty much sought after in the West. You know the ‘good Muslim’ image... This presentation is seen as an important service. The Movement also extensively advertises [Fethullah] Gülen and his ideas. Almost all their dialogue organizations mention his name.”

In the majority of the websites that belong to the Movement-affiliated organizations, I saw that Gülen’s name is mentioned along with Martin Luther King Jr, Mandela, and Gandhi. Something, in contradiction with what Murat said, came to my attention when I read about the Movement on the website of “Alliance for Shared Values,” a non-profit organization that serves as an umbrella organization for the Movement-affiliated institutions in the United States. On their website, the page about the Gülen Movement indicates that “Hizmet is not a religious effort” (Alliance for Shared Values n.d.). “That is something I also strongly disagree with,” Murat said. “Most of the Movement members perform their daily prayers. They are observant Muslims. Most of the women in the Movement wear *hijab*. I see it as window dressing. In their daily lives, many of them genuinely pray for the guidance of non-Muslim. Their eventual goal is to make everyone a member of the Movement and a Muslim.” Unsatisfied with this answer, I asked for clarification. “Where does this vision come from? Gülen himself or the members?” He replied, “I don’t think the members understand Gülen enough. He wants world peace. Of course, he wants to take Allah’s name everywhere in the world, but he is not exactly like a missionary preacher. I heard that some of his followers, in the early 2000s, tried to convert some people, but I guess Gülen did not want it. So, they are now more into interfaith dialogue.”

Something similar took place prior to Murat's example about eating pork. Murat invited me to some of the WhatsApp groups he was part of. In one group, the group members were discussing whether it was Islamically permissible to have a dog at home. People were relating their opinions, but there was no consensus. One person suggested asking Fethullah Gülen or someone from his close circle. Murat wrote a long response to this suggestion. There were several main points of his objection. He argued that any answer that came from Gülen would be binding on most people because if a religious edict or ruling comes from Gülen, people mostly obey it. Even when someone wants to reject it, the social pressure in the Movement makes it harder to voice an opposite view. In gray areas, Murat argued, there should be flexibility and freedom for people to choose from. Also, a theologian in that WhatsApp group argued that if someone has a dog, the owner, over time, will adopt some of the emotions of the dog such as bootlicking. This response made Murat furious. He wrote a lengthy tirade about this claim, arguing that there is no scientific basis for the claim of the theologian. He later cited a Canadian-Muslim scholar who has a dog in her home. "In the Movement, a theologian is more than a theologian. They are also a psychologist, sociologist, political scientist, biologist, geneticist, pedagogue, etc. Since religion is salient in the Movement, scholars of religion receive more respect than they deserve. They act like opinion leaders. Out of respect to these people, nobody is really outspoken even when they talk nonsense." Murat is also critical about their language barrier. "Most of the theologians in the Movement are not fluent in English. They insist on teaching Islam in Turkish to children who are fluent in English."

Discussion

The Yilmaz family, thanks to their family structure and worldview, proved to be a crucial case study for understanding the religious socialization process that brings together Muslim children, Muslim parents and the wider community—particularly the relationships between parents and children and how parents navigate in-group (e.g., Movement members) and out-group (non-Muslim neighbors) dynamics. Although the Yilmaz family was part of the Gülen Movement, we can still draw broader lessons about Muslim immigrants because the Movement's theology is the same as classical Sunni theology (Sunier and Şahin 2015; Yavuz 2013), which represents roughly 87-90 percent of the entire Muslim population (CIA 2010). While the Gülen Movement is also being accused of being a cult (Balci 2018), the Yilmaz family neither acted like apologists for it nor did they abundantly praise the Movement. Also, during my observation, the family did not take an active role within the decision-making process of the Movement.

We can move beyond a simple summary of the chapter, and instead, detail dynamics hinted at within Chapter Three. In particular, I can apply my arguments about first phase of religious socialization (FPRS) and second phase of religious socialization (SPRS; Chapter Two) to the case of the Yilmaz family. Table 5 below details the differences between the two phases in the Yilmaz family. In line with my earlier argument in Chapter Two, Maryam was more influential during the FPRS period, while Murat took a bigger role, albeit not always active, during the SPRS period. During the FPRS period, Maryam addressed the spiritual needs of children starting from their earliest ages, providing the majority of the religious education in those years, particularly during the children's preschool period and the early years of elementary school—efforts that included teaching them the Qur'an, answering the children's

questions about God, and bedtime reading to them. Murat's contributions in the early years were limited due to his academic commitments, yet he took over some of the duties in subsequent years: He started answering children's difficult questions about Islam, he found them age-appropriate books, and he sometimes engaging in a religious conversation with them.

[Table 5 About Here]

Again, in line with the second phase results of Chapter Two, the Yilmaz family did more outsourcing during SPRS than during the first phase (FPRS). The outsourcing practices included sending their children to weekend school, sending Selim both to his spiritual mentor's house during the seventh grade and to an Islamic school in the eighth grade, and hiring two tutors for Pelin. One tutor's entire focus was on improving Pelin's Qur'an recitation and the other tutor taught her the essentials of Islam, morality, and math.

During the FPRS, Maryam told me she was more religious (reading the Qur'an more frequently), but now due to her booming business and other commitments, she is no longer doing some of her previous spiritual practices. Murat had never been as religious as Maryam, but his religiosity level was higher when children were young. The couple's religiosity, according to their own statements, has since visibly decreased.

In terms of their social connections, the couple used to make friends based entirely on their liking. Now, they need partly need to pay attention to Pelin and Selim's preferences, as well. Hence, when they go to a picnic, they want to make sure that the family will invite has at least one good friend of Pelin or Selim. Children even tell their parents it is his or her turn to invite their best friend.

Likewise, the dominant language in the family shifted from exclusively Turkish to Turkish and English, mapping on to the two phases of religious socialization. In the FPRS, the children were read Turkish stories (mostly religious in content) before their bedtime, but now in the SPRS, the children read their own book in English. As my argument and findings in Chapter Two hold, there can be a considerable change in religious socialization practices between arrival of the first and the arrival of the second. The Yilmaz family mostly exhibited such change. Maryam read more bedtime books to Selim, whereas Pelin's bedtime activities included fewer reading activities. Similarly, Maryam spent more time on Selim's Qur'an skills, while they outsourced Pelin's Qur'an classes. Now, Pelin has an online Qur'an tutor.

During the FPRS, Turkish families in general were reluctant to celebrate any cultural American holiday (Chapter Two). As their children grew up, and during the SPRS, those same families wanted to celebrate Halloween and Fourth of July. For Maryam and Murat, their Eid celebration patterns also changed across the two phases. In the past, they would spend more time at the cultural center after the Eid prayer, but now, they are heading to entertainment centers for Eid celebration. Of course, it would be too simplistic to tie these changes to the demands of their children because Maryam and Murat also changed their worldviews across these two phases. An example is when Murat once told me about their family's visit to a Jewish friend's house to celebrate Passover with other Jewish friends of the host family. Thus, the family is now open to celebrating cultural holidays, and they now partly join the celebration of some religious holidays, such as Passover and giving gifts to neighbors on Christmas. Finally, the Yilmaz family's halal food consumption has considerably changed. Although they still mostly consume halal products, it is their definition of halal that has changed. As a

family, they now treating certain ingredients, such as vanilla extract, as halal—allowing more food products to be included under the halal banner. The only thing that did not change much was how they define halal meat. For both home and dining consumption, they only eat halal meat, but the type of restaurants they visit has dramatically increased. Now, they are able to navigate among various restaurants more confidently than they once did.

The Yilmaz family, thanks to their extensive experience of Turkish and American culture, are now able to navigate both worlds. The parents strive to carry their Muslim identity to American settings with pride, and they teach their children to be proud of this identity. They utilize their Turkish identity when they socialize with their Turkish friends, but they trivialize Turkish identity in non-Turkish settings. Their home practices are the amalgam of Turkish, Islamic, and American culture. They, however, would like to raise their children not as Turkish-Americans, but as Muslim-American.

Despite having a long-time affiliation, the couple has slowly broken away from the Movement. But they are in constant interaction with their like-minded friends in the Movement. This allows mutual interaction and influence through the exchange of ideas. Their break away from the Movement is similar to that of Turkish language. They are grateful for their presence, but they do not see these things taking up important place in their future life, which includes their children as Muslim-American adults. They also criticize certain Islamic practices and strive to adapt these practices to American culture so that their own children will not have any difficulty adopting these principles in the future. By influencing their children, friends, and the Movement, they simultaneously shape the American Islam.

Table 5: Differences between the Two Religious Socialization Phases in the Yilmaz Family

THE YILMAZ FAMILY	First Phase of Religious Socialization (FPRS)	Second Phase of Religious Socialization (SPRS)
Actors	Maryam	Murat, Hakan (the spiritual mentor), teachers at the Islamic school, Selim's mentors and roommates in the dormitory, and Pelin's tutors
Parental Religiosity Level	Maryam: high Murat: medium	Maryam: medium to high Murat: low to medium
Outsourcing Level	Almost none	Majority
Social Connections	Maryam and Murat coming together with their own best friends; children passive	Maryam and Murat partly determine their friend circle based on Pelin and Selim's best friends.
Language Preference	Turkish	English between children English, Turkish, and <i>Turkish</i> between the parents and the children
Celebration of Religious Holidays	Eid prayer, Toys r Us, and family visits	Eid prayer, entertainment places, family visits based partly on children's preferences
Celebration of Cultural Holidays	Only Thanksgiving	Halloween, Fourth of July, and Thanksgiving
Use of Religious Storybooks	Maryam read every night in Turkish	Children read on their own mostly in English. Selim read English and Turkish at the dormitory
Halal food consumption	Home consumption strictly halal, only frequented halal restaurants	Some relaxation with certain ingredients, but home meat consumption is halal only, restaurants diversified, meat choices in restaurants still halal

CONCLUSION

In this dissertation, I explored the religious socialization process of second-generation Muslim immigrant children, doing so at three levels of analysis—at public organizations, e.g., weekend schools (the macro), among a group of families (the meso), and an extensive case study within a single family (the micro). In Chapter One, I made a partial comparison of three suburban weekend schools, each operating under a mosque or a cultural center. Although I could not complete a full comparison due to COVID-19 pandemic, I was still able to observe three weekend schools—each with a different approach to Islamic education. Possessing a traditional theology, Ahmad Islamic Masjid (AIM) focused on “traditional Islam” with the *dawah* (inviting people to Islam) mindset. They strived to raise children who would be representing their Muslim identity in public space. Their teachers were mostly first-generation middle-aged immigrant women fluent in English. Yet, their teaching style did not allow students to raise questions or comment, limiting children’s agency in the classroom (but not necessarily when beyond the supervision of teachers). The school’s priority was to teach Islamic history and Arabic, but their curriculum excluded controversial parts of the Islamic history, focusing only on positive examples. If a prominent figure had some controversial actions, that time period in his biography was excluded. This reflects a general practice in Islamic schools, not focusing on unfavorable parts of history (Kinloch 2005).

Furqan Community Masjid (FCM), in contrast, presented an image of “cool Islam” with a progressive theology. Thanks to its teachers—who are technologically literate, young, and native English-speakers—they tried to raise the next generation of Muslim-Americans, combining certain elements of American culture with Islam. Also, their emphasis was more on the Muslim identity than the *dawah* itself, although they

occasionally brought up the latter. In the classroom, the college-aged and dynamic teachers gave more freedom to students than did teachers at AIM, unleashing their agency in the classroom. That meant that students were able to challenge and question some of the statements teachers made. Through hands-on activities and competitions, the school aimed to strengthen its image as a fun and a cool place to learn.

The Turkish Cultural Center (TCC) taught “light Islam” to its students. Instead of focusing on Islamic history and theology, the school adopted a modest goal of inculcating among its students the love of God and Prophet Muhammad. Most classes prioritized knowing and loving God and being grateful to Him. Unlike FCM, teachers were all first-generation immigrants from Turkey with intermediate to no English fluency. Affiliated with the Gülen Movement, a faith-based social movement, FCC used Turkish as the language of instruction. TCC treated Turkish as the *lingua sacra*, leaving not much space for English. Turkish identity was seen as equally important as the Muslim identity. Even Arabic, which was not spoken by any of the teachers, was used for only recitation and memorization purposes.

In addition to being a monocultural weekend school, TCC displayed different characteristics than AIM and FCM. Its teachers practiced reward-based Islamic education to encourage students to engage some of the Islamic rituals and to display good character traits. There was usually a tension between teachers who predominantly relied upon Turkish and students who mainly relied upon English, revealing itself either through the clashes observed during the language use, or the questions students asked to challenge their teachers. In this setting, then, the agency of their children sometimes involved power struggles over language. Finally, rituals were presented as the prerequisite for moral behaviors.

The biggest limitation of Chapter One was the interruption of my observations due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Hence, I could not observe AIM and FCM as much as TCC. But the chapter also brought new and promising directions for future work. Even though the schools were located within a similar religious tradition, they differentiated themselves in a way that resulted in three different types of stressed identities: a Muslim one for AIM, an American-Muslim one for FCM, and a Turkish-Muslim one for TCC. This differentiation should inform the future research. A comparison of theologically different schools should yield more differentiation. Despite some theological differences, these three weekend schools were all part of mainstream Sunni Islam. Another comparison might be between a suburban and an inner city immigrant weekend school to reveal the class differences that could be reflected in teaching material (Bryner 2013). Finally, the weekend schools established by native Muslim population could be a great comparative study with the immigrant ones.

Chapter Two brought this study from weekend school to that of families who sent their children to such a school—investigating the religious socialization practices of Turkish immigrant families associated with the Gülen Movement. The classic parenting styles identified in prior scholarship (Baumrind 1968, 1978, 1997) did not fit with the religious socialization strategies Turkish parents adopted because of the dynamism I found with the Turkish families. Parents changed styles as the first child aged and as more children were added to the family. Coming from similar social class backgrounds, but from different backgrounds in terms of religiosity, these families, as it turned out, practiced two types of religious socialization: the First Phase of Religious Socialization (FPRS) and Second Phase of Socialization (SPRS).

The FPRS shares some similarities to the “concerted cultivation” parenting style described by Lareau (2002), but without the social class angle that she emphasizes. In FPRS, parents are active and focused on religious socialization (especially the mothers), relying on structured activities and deliberate tasks. During this period, families also use their native tongue (Turkish) when communicating with or reading to their children, with the children in somewhat of a passive position overall. With the intense family focus on religious socialization during this first phase, outsourcing of religious education is minimal in FPRS. The SPRS shares some similarities with the “natural growth” parenting style described by Lareau (2002). During this phase, as parental involvement decreases, outsourcing increases, shifting from an intense single-actor (family) handling of a religious socialization to a multi-actor (e.g., family, weekend schools) handling of it. That outsourcing also occurs as families turn from their own intense and structured focus on religious socialization and, instead, allow that socialization to happen organically. Children become more active in this period, utilizing English more freely and celebrating religious and cultural holidays in a more dynamic manner. In my interviews, parents revealed that they moved from FPRS to SPRS during the religious socialization of their second or third child. While it is potentially possible to move from SPRS to FPRS, it did not happen among any of my respondents.

Also, parents retain expectations for their children and their socialization, reminiscent of the *natural growth* parenting style described by Lareau (2002), but among other aspects of this style, they focus on organic socialization rather than on planned or structured activities. The latter is also reminiscent of the *concerted cultivation* style than the natural growth one (Lareau 2002) because parents depend on planned activities that are scheduled with a teacher, tutor, or a mentor to help with the

religious and moral education of their children. The common point for both pathways is the fact that parental involvement decreases. Parents prefer monitoring their children's religious socialization instead of direct involvement.

Among the Gülen Movement affiliated families, the extent of what religious socialization entails and the challenges that they face—challenges that revolve around food, language, holidays, morality—have come to the fore. What we have learned about these Muslim families should pertain to other Muslim families to some extent because, for example, consuming halal food is part of Muslim identity (Bonne, Vermeir, and Verbeke 2008; James 2004). Both issues remained salient for them, whether in the first phase or second phase of religious socialization, yet how families addressed them did sometimes change across those phases.

The main limitation of Chapter Two was again the COVID-19 related inability to conduct interviews with the parents of AIM and FCM. Although I mostly used snowball sampling to recruit interview respondents, I could have reached more people to conduct my interviews with the Movement. That limitation was also salient in Chapter Three. There was only one family to carry out in-depth observation.

In Chapter Three, I took the research to the micro level, focusing intently on one family as a case study. Influenced by Lareau's (2002) ethnographic model again, I observed the Yilmaz family both in home and outside settings. Based on what they told me, they seemed to have switched from FPRS to SPRS while raising their second child. They started to outsource religious education, switched from exclusively Turkish to both Turkish and English, celebrating cultural holidays extensively, and diversifying their halal restaurant selection along with lowering the bar for halal standards.

The Yilmaz family, in general, are trying to raise their children with the skill to navigate both American and Muslim culture. They are slowly drifting away from Turkish and the Movement, although they are not completely leaving their native tongue and circle of friends behind. Such research and its findings should be of interest to various audiences. I close by offering three examples of such audiences: scholars of the Gülen Movement, lived religion, and religious socialization, respectively.

The Gülen Movement

The literature addressing the Gülen Movement offers a mostly positive perspective on it, although there a couple of exceptions (Balci 2014, 2018; Hendrick 2013; Sunier and Şahin 2015). I have come across almost a dozen conferences about the Movement, most of which took place between 2003 and 2013. All these apparently academic conferences were organized by the Movement members, sometimes for political purposes (Balci 2014). Therefore, the Movement, which happened to be the most powerful faith-based social movement in Turkey between 2005 and 2013 (Yavuz 2013), needs to be studied more rigorously and systematically.

It should be noted that some, if not many, aspects of the religious socialization process within the Gülen Movement families are likely unique to them. The fact that these families are Turkish and that they belong to a certain faith-based social movement prevents us from over-generalizing our findings to non-Turkish or non-Movement members. That said, these families theologically fall under mainstream Sunni Islam, which comprises 87-90 percent of the entire Muslim population (CIA 2010). Hence, the results imply that their family practices could be like other Sunni Muslims. Indeed, as a Sunni Muslim myself, I did not see a dramatic difference between my own family

practices and those of these families. While they show extra respect for Fethullah Gülen by reading his books, listening to his sermons, and adopting his principles, the Islamic rituals they perform daily overlap with the other Turkish-Muslim communities I have encountered.

GM-affiliated families mostly do not tell their children about Fethullah Gülen in their preschool and elementary school years. Gülen himself was not mentioned by the families during the interviews in Chapter Two, although he encompasses an important space within the spiritual landscape of the Movement members. Given that some of those I observed provided *light Islam* at their weekend schools and home, the basic knowledge they provide could be found in other Sunni households, as well. One salient practice that would make a difference could be the emphasis on being a role model and good representation. While this can be expected from all families, GM members utilize this in a couple of ways, including catering to the subconscious or consciously leading by example. Maybe another practice could be the extreme care families display when consuming halal food, particularly at home.

One of the most common points respondents unanimously agreed upon was the importance of morality within religion. Although, Winchester (2008) demonstrated how a group of Muslim converts have created their own moral habitus through *salat*, fasting, and other rituals, not all our respondents in this study necessarily agreed with this phenomenon. For example, respondents like Levent argued that *salat* or any other ritual is not enough to construct morality. They drew their argument from Turkey's Islamist government, which is notorious for its corruption. The main reason for this divergence could be the fact that the new converts in Winchester's study displayed extra passion and gratitude for being a Muslim. Such passion is not unusual for new Muslim converts

(Neumueller 2012). Unfortunately, it takes such people to extremes such as joining global jihadist groups (Azani and Koblenz-Stenzler 2022). However, in our case, the GM-affiliated people have been disillusioned with the premise that the observance of rituals will lead to a moral life. “This is not only about Erdoğan. Nursi talks about the main issues Muslim world is facing and one of them is corruption and immorality. That is something we have been seriously facing as the Muslim world,” Kerem noted.

Some respondents argued that the problem was not only about Erdoğan, but that the Muslim world in general suffered from this corruption. For example, a couple of respondents in Chapter Two and Murat, my main case study subject in Chapter Three, gave a reference to an academic article in which countries were ranked according to their obedience to Islamic rules. It turns out there was only one Muslim majority country in top 30. They kept alluding to this article, during our conversations, that Muslim majority countries were not Muslim enough. The article, published in *Global Economy Journal*, (Scheherazade and Askari 2010) set out to find out whether “self-declared Islamic countries, as attested by membership in the OIC (Organization of Islamic Conference), embrace policies that are founded on Islamic teachings,” (p. 2). The authors, based on the Qur’an and the sayings of Prophet Muhammad, created what they called an *Islamicity index* (p. 3), which allowed them to measure all sovereign countries in the world based on the “[A]dherence to Islamic principles using four sub-indices related to economics, legal and governance, human and political rights, and international relations” (p. 4).

I could not find out how this article gained recognition within the community, but it was referenced several times by various people. Nevertheless, it was frequently used to make the argument that the governments of Muslim majority countries do not

follow Islamic principles as much as Muslim minority countries. Recently, Kuru, in his book, *Islam, Authoritarianism, and Underdevelopment: A Global and Historical Comparison* (2019: 1-2), has attempted to answer the question why “Muslim-majority countries exhibit high levels of authoritarianism and low levels of socio-economic development in comparison to world averages.”

This apparently ironic situation buttressed by recent scholarship is at odds with the argument Winchester (2008) makes about the convert Muslims. Gülen Movement community, partly due to their recent traumas with the Erdoğan government, is of the idea that moral dispositions are not always the result of complying with Islamic rituals. Interestingly, this is also at odds with the practices of their own weekend school where rituals were prioritized more than the character traits. Parents do not always necessarily agree with the weekend school practices. . The Movement members’ particular emphasis on the relationship between morality and Islamic rituals is outside the realm of the Muslim converts’ practices in the literature.

Scholars of the Gülen Movement, thus, may find this dissertation of interest—particularly as it shows a nuanced relationship between its members and the Movement, as well as the role of faith in their lives and in how they raise their children. Further, the movement has a peculiar outlook which makes categorization difficult. It displays the conventional characteristics of a social movement, but at the same time, some movement members engage in cult-like behaviors. GM advocates peace, but it is also accused of masterminding the coup attempt in Turkey. Even though its followers have been operating schools and claiming to be a global movement, the movement is still Turkish in its identity and structure. On the one hand the fluidity and ambiguity that surrounds the Movement needs to be studied; on the other hand, the oppression of the

members in Turkey along with their survival strategies in various countries have the potential to go in many different directions for the future research.

Lived Religion

Scholars of religion should be interested with my dissertation as well, particularly given what I have found in terms of lived religion. Interviews revealed that the religious socialization process our respondents engaged with is very much intertwined with what Ammerman (2020) calls “lived religion.” She argues that in order to undertake the systematic study of religious practice, we need to pay special attention to embodiment, materiality, emotion, aesthetics, moral judgment, narrative, and spirituality (p.21). She examines all these six elements through the example of prayer and elaborates on the potential avenues for research (p.22).

I discovered in my field notes that the religious socialization process of Turkish Muslim children reflected many of Ammerman’s lived religion concepts. For example, five-time daily prayer, *salat*, is one of the areas the lived religion concept can be applied. I chose *salat* because it is the closest thing to Ammerman’s prayer example. Also, there are two rituals that are obligatory on all Muslims: *salat* and fasting. The other two rituals, *zakat* (annual almsgiving) and *hajj* (pilgrimage to Mecca) are conditional and one needs to be Islamically rich to perform them. Fasting is seasonal, and the obligatory fasting is only observed in the month of Ramadan, which lasts a month. That leaves us with only *salat* that is required five times a day all year long.

As Ammerman mentioned (2020: 20), people feel the prayer because it consists of bodily movements. But at the same, it could be the arena where power, religious practice, and body intersect (p.21). Muslims are required to cover certain parts of their

body during prayer. Men and women cover different parts of their body. Through socialization, Muslim children already know all the basic the details. For example, at the weekend school, one kindergarten student stated that women cover their hair for the prayer, men wear kufi (Muslim cap), men pray in the front, and women pray at the back. This piece of information, thanks to religious socialization, has become common knowledge even for a kindergarten student. Also, Muslim children have internalized what people wear for prayer, where people are supposed to stand, what prayers they need to recite, and the associated gender roles. Because there is no uniform practice among the Muslim Americans regarding the location of men and women during the prayer, the religious socialization of a child in a community where women are treated like second-class citizens versus that of another child in a community where women are among the decision-makers will result in different worldviews and identities. As mentioned in the introduction, AIM, FCM, and TCC have different practices regarding the location of women in their mosques. Even the presence of a partition differed in these mosques. For example, at TCC, there is a partition made of solid wood with some holes in it to segregate the genders. Through those big holes, women can still see the imam when he preaches or delivers the sermon.

On the other hand, it is hard to make a claim that women in the Gülen Movement are showing resistance to men by covering their bodies (Mahmood 2012). Female respondents told me that they decided to wear hijab out of their piety, religious requirement, or it was God's order on them. They do not use hijab as a weapon against the male dominated world. Some respondents like Ece and Fulya were critical of the men, particularly those in leadership positions, in the Movement. These women display their resistance by not attending the cultural center or not sending their children to the

weekend school anymore. So, they resist through protest, and they protest by being absent.

When it comes to materiality, Ammerman draws attention to objects that are instrumental in prayers (2020:23). Movement members strive to make *salat* memorable for their children. In many houses I have been to, there were kids-size prayer rugs. Respondents related that their children were taking pride for having a personalized and customized prayer rug. Probably that is why the weekend school gifted customized prayer rugs for all their students in Ramadan. Because TCC has already been implementing a sophisticated reward system, they want to make sure these rewards will be memorable for children in their adult life. Some children, at the weekend school, were bragging about the kufi, prayer bead, and prayer rug collection they had.

There were plenty of emotional moments during the interviews when respondents talked about their memories of first prayer, or the first time they covered their heads, etc. Various emotions were frequently emphasized during the interviews. Actually, it was the lack of certain emotions that were salient during the periods of decline in some people's religiosity. When respondents lost certain emotions, they did not have the same enthusiasm to make a spiritual commitment. Some respondents admitted that they were still praying because of the mandatory status of *salat*, despite the lack of emotion. This confirms Ammerman's statement that "emotions are critical to lived religious practice," (2020:24).

I was told respondents used to become emotional when listening to the sermons of Fethullah Gülen, whose emotional style is reminiscent of the 1980s televangelists. Some parents want their children to experience the same emotional level, but it is hard to fathom whether they would ever do because of the language barrier. I observed that

children would not get emotional when reading a poem or singing a religious song because I did not think they comprehended all the lyrics. However, when they talked about *salat* in their classes, weekend schoolteachers tried to convey the emotion they would feel in prayer.

Children internalized gender roles through the embodiment of prayer, showed agency through owning prayer rugs and decorating them (aesthetics). However, they could not fully express their emotions when they were kept away from English, the language with which they are most comfortable. Parents, on the other hand, showed emotion and spirituality through prayer, trying to be a good example for their children. Finally, through end-of-semester or Qur'an recitation parties, they wanted children to be connected to these important life cycle events. Future research could open new avenues for the practices of lived religion.

Aesthetics is an area that is normally not prevalent in the Movement. But when I considered some of the aesthetic elements, I found a few interesting points. Respondents told me they enjoyed listening to those who have a beautiful voice while reciting the Qur'an during the *salat*. Also, some children showcased their artistic skills when they helped their parents decorate during the Ramadan. Some families have been doing these Ramadan decorations every year for the last couple of years. In these families, children are already familiar with the tradition. Likewise, in one of the arts and crafts classes, children decorated their own prayer rugs. This allowed children to take pride in their creative skills.

Interestingly, Murat told me that for the last few years, right after the Eid prayer, the imam of the cultural center made a lengthy supplication in which he asked for God's help to punish those who persecuted them. This was something similar to Ammerman's

argument on morality when she stated that “Prayers may call down divine wrath on evildoers or enact compassion and solidarity in their very expression,” (Ammerman 2020:26).

Finally, Ammerman (2020) has connected important life cycle events to the biographies of religious communities (p. 29). Turkish families and the weekend school attached extra importance to such events for children. I have been to several parties thrown for children who have just started reading the Qur’an or who have started performing *salat* regularly. That way, they turned those parties into good memories. Yet the main motivation of the parents was to warm their children’s heart to religion through rewards and parties.

Bi-Directionality in the Socialization Process

Finally, some important points emerged for the scholars of religious socialization. My dissertation has demonstrated that children’s agency during religious socialization process is dynamic and sophisticated. As the recent literature (see Mayall 2002; Turmel 2008; Wyness 2006) has argued, children are not passive recipient of any information. Rather, they resist, oppose, interpret, react, and question most religious knowledge through their own cultural upbringing. By engaging in a variety of activities, children are the active actors of bi-directionality in the socialization process.

However, bi-directionality in different phases of religious socialization should be investigated more closely. As I showed in this research, there are two distinct phases of religious socialization. Children’s agency and the overall bi-directionality evolves over the course of these two phases. For example, parents shape some of their socialization efforts during the second phase based on the requests and demands of their children. It

has also been revealed that children's agency is fairly much related to their cultural capital and sense of entitlement (Lareau 2002). Children who come from the families that do not instill the sense of questioning displayed more reticent attitudes in the classroom. Of course, the teaching style was also conducive to reveal agency for the children.

This study sheds light how American-born Muslim immigrant children are gaining their distinctive Muslim identity by way of the religious socialization process. As the famous saying, "It takes a village to raise a child" goes, raising a Muslim child in America takes the participation of various actors and organizations. The communities I studied are all aware of what America presents a Muslim child; therefore, they want to make they raise proud Muslim youth that will exist and thrive in the multicultural world of America.

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