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April 16th, 2014

Hizmet Travels: From Anatolia to Atlanta

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Abstract

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My senior honors thesis examines the transnational identity of the *hizmet* movement, otherwise known as the Gülen Movement, as it has traveled from the Anatolian region of Turkey into the American city of Atlanta. Combining a variety of disciplinary approaches, such as history, sociology, and anthropology, I attempt to trace how the movement has grown from a small, piety based assertion of Islamic identity led by Fethullah Gülen within a modernizing, secularizing Turkey, to a transnational, educational, socio-civic movement that has incorporated neo-liberal discourses of human rights, dialogue, tolerance, and pluralism as Gülen has retreated into the United States in his old age. In portraying how *hizmet* travels, both through time, as a religious concept meaning “service,” and place, as a transnational movement of over three million people, I demonstrate how the movement has established and expressed itself in different ways as it has localized into new communities, creating institutions with diverse mission statements catering to the distinct places in which it operates, yet retaining similar visions of a world beyond poverty, conflict, and ignorance based in Gülen’s Islamic understandings.

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Introduction

“I want *hizmet* to have an American identity,” said Kemal Korucu, a Turkish-American businessman living in Atlanta, Georgia.

Mr. Korucu is the director for interfaith events hosted by Atlanta’s Atlantic Institute, one out of thousands of organizations throughout the world inspired by Fethullah Gülen, the Turkish imam who founded the *hizmet* movement during the 1960s in a small city in the region of Anatolia, Turkey. Having driven the forty minutes it takes to get from the city of Decatur to Alpharetta, where Mr. Korucu and his family live amongst much of the Turkish immigrant community in the metro Atlanta area, I removed my shoes out of respect upon entering their modestly sized, suburban house. Mr. Korucu provided me with some comfy house slippers and introduced me to his playful two-year old daughter, Leyla,¹ who greeted me shyly at the door.

When I walked into their simply furnished living room, I met Meera,² Mr. Korucu’s wife, who stopped and smiled to greet me though she was in the midst of hurriedly putting together a small plate of cookies and nuts. Before sitting down beside me on the couch to join in on our interview, she set these in front of me along with a glass of *çay*, or Turkish tea. Thanking her while thinking of my Pakistani family’s own ritual of greeting any guest to our home with a glass of *chai*, I wondered briefly, “Could this hospitality I am encountering be *hizmet*?” Perhaps it was or wasn’t, but I became intrigued by the question of how *hizmet* is articulated and expressed by the individual people and group networks who practice it, especially as they travel, crossing borders and boundaries, blurring or restructuring cultural and national lines of identity in the

¹ Name changed to protect identity of participant

² Name changed to protect identity of participant

movement. Responding to Mr. Korucu's statement, I decided to ask, "What does *hizmet* identity comprise already, and what changes when it becomes American?"

Although my interview with Mr. Korucu's family was one of my first with practitioners of *hizmet* affiliated with the movement in Atlanta, this question remained a foundation for my project. Gülen's notion of *hizmet*, which directly translates to "service" in English, has inspired a movement as those motivated by Gülen's teachings over the years have built several privately-funded socio-civic institutions, such as universities, media outlets, publishing houses, hospitals, think-tanks, and aid organizations in Turkey in addition to hundreds of schools. In the past few decades, these schools, which do not teach religion unless the government mandates it, have multiplied and expanded into about 160 countries outside of Turkey, giving the movement a transnational quality and global presence. Gülen himself, a controversial figure in Turkey as recent Turkish politics as of December 2013 demonstrate,³ moved to the United States in 1998 and remains there for "medical treatment," as he describes, though most scholars suggest this is also a self-imposed exile (Yavuz 2013, Hendrick 2013). Affiliated with an estimated three million people, *hizmet* has drawn a great deal of international attention over the past couple decades, especially in America, where it has evoked debate and speculation in the public discourse about whether it is a transnational Islamist organization,⁴ a "moderate" Islamic reform movement,⁵ or a type of cult, sect, or order inspired by Fethullah Gülen as a charismatic leader of sorts.⁶

³ In December 2013, Prime Minister Tayyip Erdogan of Turkey's Justice and Development Party (AKP) openly derided Gülen for undermining the Turkish state through establishing a "parallel state" in Turkey based on the growing popularity of his faith-based teachings on *hizmet*.

⁴ See: Berlinski, Claire. "Ten Things You Need to Know About Turkey." *FOX News*. N.p., 28 Mar. 2014. Web. 28 Mar. 2014.

⁵ See: Tavernise, Sabrina. "Turkish Schools Offer Pakistan a Gentler Islam." *The New York Times*. The New York Times, 03 May 2008. Web. 20 Mar. 2014.

The identity of the movement has thus become a question in the United States fraught with political implications, drawing upon popular terminology and rhetoric of the post-9/11 American environment to describe Islam and the Muslim *other*.⁷ Edward Said, the prominent Palestinian-American critical studies theorist who established the term “Orientalism” in the late 1970s, discussed the rise of these discourses in an article entitled “The Clash of Ignorance” written shortly after the events of September 11th, 2001. Upon reading this, along with Mahmood Mamdani’s “Good Muslim, Bad Muslim,” which discusses the American media’s role in shaping problematic constructions of Muslim identity as either categorically “good” or “bad,” I became interested in locating *hizmet*’s identity as a faith-based, transnational socio-civic movement within an intensifying culture of orientalist discourse in the United States, in which fear of the Muslim “other” was fueling reductive understandings of Islamic identity.

Methodology

Drawing upon the theoretical frameworks of Lila Abu-Lughod in “Can There Be A Feminist Ethnography?” and Talal Asad in *Genealogies of Religion*, I wanted to examine the identity of the *hizmet* movement through a deep exploration of the historical, political, and philosophical roots that brought it into existence and shaped it throughout time, while also directly communicating with individuals who comprise the movement contemporarily, so as to examine the movement’s identity from multiple perspectives and selfhoods. Said stated in 2001 that “primitive passions and sophisticated know-how converge in ways that give the lie to a fortified boundary not only between ‘West’ and ‘Islam’ but also between past and present, us and

<http://www.nytimes.com/2008/05/04/world/asia/04islam.html?pagewanted=all>

⁶ See: Strauss, Valerie. "Largest Charter Network in U.S.: Schools Tied to Turkey." *Washington Post*. The Washington Post, 26 Mar. 2012. Web. 20 Mar. 2014.

⁷ See the Center for American Progress’s Report, *Fear Inc.* (2011), for an explanation of which terminology has been utilized to refer to Muslims in the aftermath of 9/11 and how it has been propagated in the United States to spread Islamophobic discourses.

them, to say nothing of the very concepts of identity and nationality” that surround the disagreements and debates about Muslims in the United States (Said 2001). This idea stimulated me to work on disrupting these monolithic boundaries “with the assumption of difference in sameness, of a self that participates in multiple identifications, and an other that is also partially the self,” so that this study could come to an understanding beyond “the impasse of fixed self/other or subject/object divide that so disturbs [scholarship],” as discussed by Abu-Lughod. (Abu-Lughod 1990, 127).

Being a Pakistani-American Muslim, I can acknowledge that there are both “insider” and “outsider” aspects to my research. The project was driven in part by my interest in a transnational movement begun by Muslims who were emphasizing education, dialogue, and nonviolence, which were principles I could relate to as a Muslim compared to the hard-line Islamist politics and violent activities of other transnational movements like Al-Qaeda and the Taliban, though these are the ones emphasized at present by American media and dominant political discourse. Still, while I had been interested in examining *hizmet* for reasons which were motivated out of my own Islamic understandings initially, upon delving deeper into my research, I realized *hizmet* was a much more complex, historically and politically shaped phenomenon, whose discourses, actions, and popularity could not be limited to solely Islamic motivations, but also reflected political, social, and historical circumstances and conditions. Though I worked to critically examine and analyze my findings to the best of my abilities, I believe, as Christopher Chesnek has discussed (2002), elements of my own “religiosity”⁸ are invariably reflected in my research. As Abu Lughod states, however, this awareness can improve one’s scholarly insights

⁸ Chesnek explains “religiosity” as a quality in all people who are interested in exploring questions of “meaning, purpose, value and practice”—which is almost everyone (2002, 56).

because when “the creation of a self through opposition to an other is blocked...the multiplicity of the self, and the multiple, overlapping, and interacting qualities of others cannot be ignored...showing us that we are always part of what we study and we always stand in definite relations to it” (1990, 127).

Many of the scholars I cite in my research are insiders in important ways. Some are Turkish Muslims. Others, like many American scholars I cite, are not, but have been exposed to affiliated institutions of the movement through participating in academic conferences and trips to Turkey sponsored by *hizmet* participants. Very few scholars I drew from directly identify as part of the *hizmet* movement, but it is difficult to know exactly who is an “insider” and who is an “outsider,” especially because these descriptions depend on how we define these terms and categories in relation to the movement. Still, throughout this thesis, I work to identify the scholars I draw from as best as I can.

I define the movement by the term “*hizmet*” rather than “Gülen” throughout my research, though I still refer to peoples, communities, and organizations as “Gülen-inspired.” My reason for doing this (unlike many other scholars who refer to the movement as the “Gülen Movement”) is to respect those within the movement who use the term *hizmet* to describe themselves and their work, and disagree with being identified as “followers of Gülen” or part of the “Gülen Movement.” Many of those I interviewed and spoke with felt that using these phrases incorrectly positioned Gülen politically at the fore of their work and as their “spiritual leader,” when in reality, the movement is inspired by Gülen’s ideas yet ambiguously organized, loosely structured, and individually expressed. Additionally, while many Muslims in the movement feel that Gülen is their teacher, most believe Prophet Mohammad is the only one that can be their “spiritual leader.”

This thesis examines how *hizmet* travels and crosses borders—not only between Turkey and transnational terrain, but also between complex categorical identities like ‘religious’ or ‘secular,’ ‘western’ or ‘eastern,’ and ‘modern’ or ‘traditional.’ This project asks: how does the *hizmet* movement construct its identity on the world stage while living out its principles in local, small-scale contexts? How do Gülen-inspired people engage politically, culturally, and socially around the world, and also retain aspects of being a community originally founded in Turkey? And, how has the movement expressed itself over time as both ‘religious’ and ‘secular,’ ‘eastern’ and ‘western,’ and ‘modern’ and ‘traditional,’ in response to distinct categorical outlines?

Keeping in mind Abu-Lughod’s theory of multiple selfhoods and perspectivalities, I worked to answer these questions through a multi-disciplinary approach. I used a historical lens to understand the emergence of the movement through analyzing primary and secondary materials on Gülen’s philosophy and theological worldview while consulting academic scholarship on Turkish politics and history. I also undertook a sociological framework in examining the *hizmet* through the angle of “transnationalism” as I drew upon the ethnographic fieldwork of others who have examined the *hizmet* movement’s activities in several different parts of the world. I also conducted my own ethnographic research in Atlanta over a six month period in order to observe local perspectives and expressions of *hizmet*, which are featured in chapter four, *Perspectives from Atlanta*.

The first chapter explains the emergence of the movement, showing how Turkey’s political circumstances and state ideology led to the development and expansion of *hizmet* as a faith-based civil society project in Turkey. It addresses what the guiding national ideology consisted of in the Turkish Republic, how its secular politics came about based on the downfall of the Ottoman Empire, and in what ways these Turkish politics have affected where and in what forms some

Turkish Muslims expressed their religious identities as a result of changing political and economic conditions into the present.

Contextualized by the political background of the movement's formation, the second chapter explores the personal history and intellectual influences of its founding figure, Fethullah Gülen. This chapter attempts to illuminate the development of *hizmet* first as a concept and then, gradually, as an identity for the transnational educational movement inspired by Gülen's social application of his Islamic understandings.

The third chapter explores the *hizmet* movement's expansion beyond the borders of the Turkish state, demonstrating how the movement has continued to develop both philosophically and compositionally as it has traveled into other nation-states and emerged on the global scene. It brings the movement into its post-nineties phase of "transnationalism," which is a concept that will be explored in detail throughout the chapter, and sets up for an examination of the movement's identity as it is expressed in local contexts, while maintaining a newly global presence.

The fourth chapter finally locates the movement in Atlanta, Georgia as I ethnographically explore the activities carried out by *hizmet*-affiliated institutions located there, and the religious and cultural understandings and motivations of the individual people who identify with *hizmet* as it has localized into Atlanta, expressing and articulating the movement in new ways and creative modes of being as its has traveled from Turkish Anatolia and found itself within the American city of Atlanta.

Chapter One

The Politics of Articulating Faith in Secular Turkey

This chapter works to portray how the circumstances and state ideology in Turkey led to the development of *hizmet* as a faith-based, socio-civic movement resulting out of particular political and historical conditions. This history is critical to an understanding of the contemporary movement led by Turkish Muslims because, as prominent scholar of religion William Cantwell Smith phrased it, “To a considerable extent...the characteristic quality of the Turks in the modern Muslim world seems to rest on the uniqueness of their immediate past. (The prime matter here is continuity: the unbroken sequence from their medieval grandeur, including a persisting independence—and therefore active responsibility)” (Smith 1957, 162). Contemporary expressions of Turkish and Muslim identity thus cannot be understood without acknowledging their situated identity and allusions to a Turkish past.

When Turkey emerged as a republic in 1923, after the gradual breakdown of the Ottoman Empire, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder and first president of the Turkish state, swiftly abolished the Caliphate, outlawed popular Sufi *tarikats* (mystical orders or brotherhoods), and banned ‘Islamic’ clothing such as headscarves. Through these actions, he worked to define Turkey under a national ideology clearly separate from, if not oppositional to, the Islamic tradition which once thrived in the days of the Ottoman Empire. This chapter will address why Atatürk took these actions, what the guiding national ideology consisted of in the Republic, and how these Turkish politics have affected where and in what forms some Turkish Muslims expressed their religious identities as a result of changing political and economic conditions into the present.

Dissolution of the Ottoman Empire

Ataturk's negative position towards the religious traditions of the Ottoman Turkish past was informed by a prominent stance taken by Turkish political elites of the time: that 'secularism'—and their particular, oppositional understanding of secularism—“was the only path to modernity, progress, and state power” (Yavuz & Esposito 2003, xiii). To understand this, we must provide context from the late Ottoman period. Here I will draw upon Hakan Yavuz, Turkish political scientist who has written extensively on Turkish political identity and the “Gülen movement” and currently resides at the University of Utah. He is coeditor of the book *Turkish Islam and the Secular State: The Gülen Movement* with John Esposito, prominent Islamic Studies and International Affairs scholar and director of the Center for Muslim—Christian Understanding at Georgetown University. In this book, they explain that power in the Ottoman Empire belonged to a complex and decentralized web of relations between the military and bureaucratic system on the one hand, and Islamic institutions on the other. Periodically, there were tensions between political and religious leadership as the Islamic networks “served as the protective shields against excesses of state power because they contained and nourished the civil code of interactions” (Yavuz & Esposito 2003, xix). In other words, they were established authorities next to the political authorities of the time, and Ottoman political institutions vied for the authorizing legitimacy of the localized, Islamic networks that held strong ties and favor with much of the populace. As British social anthropologist Richard Tapper notes in his book *Islam in Modern Turkey: Religion Politics, and Literature in a Secular State*, although the Ottoman Empire held a large multi-ethnic and multi-religious citizenry, it was careful politically to ensure these Islamic institutions viewed the state favorably to maintain political legitimacy (1991, 32).

When European colonial penetration expanded and the Ottomans lost territory in the early 18th century, the Ottoman bureaucracy decided to take up a series of ‘centralizing’ and ‘modernizing’ measures to retain control of the Empire and adjust to the challenges of a “dynamic and innovative Europe,” as Feroz Ahmad, political scientist and historian on Turkey discusses in *The Making of Modern Turkey* (1993, 22). These ‘modernizing’ measures, implemented throughout the rest of the 18th century and well into the 19th, mainly meant consolidating and strengthening the state “through transforming the army into an agent of ordering society in accordance with the needs of the state...and [introducing] science and technology for economic development” (Yavuz & Esposito 2003, xix). Before introducing these measures, the *ulema*, or learned scholars of Islamic authority within the Empire, had refused to go along with earlier, ‘centralizing’ reforms that would undermine their own positions. As Ahmad writes, “there was no force in society, neither bourgeoisie nor a landed aristocracy, to which the sultan could turn in [those times] to order to counter the power of the Islamic authorities” (1993, 23). Therefore significant institutional changes were made during this period of the 19th century to restore the authority of the center and increase the autonomy of the “official class *vis-à-vis* the sultan, who regarded them [the political elite] as his minions” (Ahmad 2003, 25). Through these changes, not only did the *ulema* lose financial independence as religious endowments were taken over to instead pay officials of the state, but they also began to lose their legitimacy to power as a new bureaucratic class, with scientific educations and strong loyalties for solely the state, began to emerge.

The Tanzimat Period and Rise of the Young Turks

By the mid-nineteenth century, this bureaucratic elite class implemented certain measures that would ‘modernize’ Ottoman society through a new program of reform and reorganization

known in Turkish as the *Tanzimat*. These reforms consisted of changing the banking system, decriminalizing homosexuality, conscripting a modern army, and replacing any religious laws with ‘secular’ law.

Having been educated under Western models of science and technology, much of this new bureaucracy had received its higher university education in Western Europe. Thus, many were influenced by the Western European emphasis on principles of science, reason, and rationality for the order and regulation of a “nation-state” society, which they understood to be successful economically and socially, and therefore, a “progressive” or “modern” means of political organization (Yavuz & Esposito 2003, xix). The “Men of the Tanzimat,” as they were called, felt that because they had a scientific education like their European counterparts, they could improve Ottoman society by implementing their European-influenced notions of ‘modernity’ into Ottoman politics. They wanted their society to be guided and organized by “reason rather than religion, which they felt was ‘backward’ and had contributed to the weakening of the Ottoman Empire” (Yavuz & Esposito 2003, xix). The Men of the Tanzimat’s *oppositional* stance against religion combined with their interest in consolidating state power thus “introduced, during the Tanzimat Reforms, the conception of a Turkish nationality based on a Durkheimian *positivist* political philosophy,” meaning a nation organized *solely under principles of reason and science* (Yavuz & Esposito xix, 2003). Discussing the secularization process that took place as these Reforms were implemented during the latter half of the 19th century, Richard Tapper refers to Donald Smith’s book *Religion and Political Modernization*, stating that four of Smith’s five identified types of societal secularization methods took place during the latter stages of the Ottoman Empire, namely:

- (1) *Polity separation secularization*, meaning the institutional separation of religion and politics and the denial of the religious identity of the polity; (2) *polity expansion*

secularization, meaning the expansion of the political system into areas of society formerly regulated by religion; (3) *political culture secularization*, meaning the transformation of values associated with the polity, and the replacing of religious by secular notions of politics, political community and political legitimacy; (4) *political process secularization*, meaning the decline in the political saliency of religious leaders, interest groups and issues. (Tapper 1991, 33)

The fifth, he explains, “*polity dominance secularization*, or the initiation of an open governmental attack on the religious basis of general culture, and the forcible imposition of secular ideology on the political culture,” was to become the essence of Kemalist reforms when the Republic was established (Tapper 1991, 33).

This bureaucratic elite continued to build power around itself through its state-centric policies into the first decade of the twentieth century. They believed the state had to be interventionist in order to transform society under the ‘positivist’ culture they imagined, but this caused the reformers to destroy existing social and economic structures in order to make way for new ones. As Ahmad explains, “these developments appealed to the reformers who believed that the destruction of outmoded structures would accelerate westernization and force Ottomans to innovate” (1993, 29). However, this caused much dissatisfaction in the population at large as the empire faced decline through economic destabilization and ethnic conflict. Towards the latter end of the nineteenth century, a Muslim interest group called the Young Ottomans publicly opposed and criticized the Empire as it brought its people to the verge of bankruptcy. In 1876, the group was able to force the regime to adopt a constitution with the aid of European powers. However, when many Ottoman landholders gained freedom from state control by securing private property rights in the new constitution, they emerged as a majority-Muslim, conservative interest group capable of the power to refuse reformist initiatives of the state.

Thus, in order to restore the old constitution so as to gain back power, the bureaucratic elite came under the new name of the “Young Turks” and aligned with a political organization

called the Committee for Union and Progress (CUP) in 1906. It was this body that led the movement to restore the constitution and carried out the revolution of 1908. When the Empire disbanded after World War One, it was the Young Turks' major ideological traits, "unquestioned faith in positivism as a guide to polity and society, the determination to create a 'modern' society in the image of Western Europe to consolidate the power of the state, and passion for elite rule" (Yavuz & Esposito 2003, xx), that laid the foundation for the national ideology of the Republic of Turkey.

The New Republic

Mustafa Kemal, an army officer aligned with the Young Turks' Movement, successfully led the Turkish national movement in the Turkish War of Independence. In 1923, with the abolition of the Caliphate, he became the Republic of Turkey's first president, and became known as Ataturk under the banner of the Committee of Union and Progress. As Yavuz & Esposito note, though he never hesitated while leading the army to utilize Islam in order to mobilize the population against the invading European armies or integrate all Anatolian Muslims into a Turkish nation, "after achieving national independence Ataturk implemented a series of rigid secularization measures by denying any role for Islam in the formation of a new polity" (2003, xx).

Ataturk wanted to see Turkey transformed into a 'modern' nation-state, a state, in his own words, that would "live as an advanced and civilized nation in the midst of contemporary civilization" (qtd. in Ahmad 1993, 53). As the Young Turks' positivist ideology proclaimed, this meant such a nation would have to be secular and rational, emphasizing science and modern education in order to create the industrial economy Ataturk envisioned as he continually looked towards the model of Western Europe. To achieve its vision of modernity, the Kemalist doctrine

consisted of six main principles: nationalism, secularism, republicanism, statism, reformism, and populism. Atatürk wanted to forge a Turkish national identity by eliminating all other factors of difference among the Turks, which included class, regionality, and religion. Positivism thus became a guiding national philosophy that could enforce these principles to promote a united Turkish nation and restructure societal institutions, while actively preventing and controlling religious influence in the public sphere.

The legal reform acts of the 1920s sought to reshape the everyday lives of citizens along the lines of the Kemalist philosophy described above. Atatürk's new laws particularly targeted religious tradition, perhaps in part because, as Jenny White, social anthropologist at Boston University and author of several books on Turkish politics and identity, discusses, Atatürk initially experimented with Islamic language and imagery as a means to unify the mostly Muslim nation, but after several religiously inspired revolts against the new state, he may have—once and for all—determined religious organization dangerous to the survival of the new state, and therefore oppositional to his view of Turkish modernity (2013, 25). “For the Kemalists, religion was thus a dangerous, divisive force in society that could not be eliminated and so had to be kept under the thumb of the new state” (White 2013, 28). To keep religion under its “thumb” so to speak, the state implemented a series of reforms. In March 1924, all religious schools were closed down and replaced by a unified and secular state education system. A year later, as Kerem Öktem, geographer and political scientist at Oxford University, writes in his book *Angry Nation: Turkey since 1989*, “all religious convents, religious brotherhoods and dervish lodges, the cornerstones of a specifically Ottoman Islamic tradition and the repositories of Ottoman religious culture, were closed down and most brotherhoods went underground” (2011, 28). Headscarves were banned in public institutions like the Grand National Assembly and civil service, and in the

streets, priests could not wear their collars and imams were forbidden from wearing their turbans. The Weekend Act and the introduction of the international time and calendar system, also implemented in 1925, abolished the traditional Islamic holiday on Friday and replaced it with the Christian day of rest, Sunday—not for any religious purpose, but because it was the day of rest in Europe and the rest of the “modern world.” In 1928, the use of the Ottoman Arabic script, “the most visible articulation of the Islamic cultural heritage”, was prohibited amid the introduction of the new Turkish, i.e. Latin, alphabet (Öktem 2011, 28). These policies, along with several others of the time, reflected the type of “preventative secularism” Donald Smith refers to in his description of the ‘fifth type’ of secularization process, “polity dominance secularization.”⁹

The Young Turks had been strongly influenced by the French Revolution and its Jacobin tradition of anticlericalism and state-enforced (or “polity dominance”) secularism, also known as *laicism*. However, instead of formally separating religion and state as France did in 1905, the Kemalists established something called *laiklik* in Turkish, or “state Islam”, which meant “state control over religion and a strong state role in keeping religion out of the public sphere” (White 2013, 28). This entailed not only banning the display of religious symbols in public places like state buildings, schools, and hospitals, but also establishing the Directorate of Religious Affairs (*Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı*), which trained and oversaw all religious specialists; supervised mosques, religious schools, and Islamic education; vetted sermons; and translated religious texts and interpreted them for the Turkish public (White 2013, 28). The *Diyanet* also issued advice on “How to be a good Muslim,” which the state felt compatible with a rational, scientific, secular society (White 2013, 28).

⁹ Described in the section entitled “The Tanzimat Period and Rise of the Young Turks”.

While this process of “secularization” may have been successful in the sense that it gave Turks a clear national ideology and means of organizing society in regards to what it meant—culturally, territorially, linguistically, religiously—to be a Turkish nation (under the definition of Ataturk), it also complicated, confused, and compartmentalized the relationship between many Turks’ individual linguistic, territorial, cultural, and religious traditions with the new nationally-enforced construction of “Turkish identity.” As Ahmad notes, the authoritarian nature of the Kemalist state, particularly its control and restrictions in the realm of popular religious practice, furthered the separation between the regime and its people, especially as the military gained position and power as “the protector of the Kemalist nation” in enforcing these rules upon the public (1993, 71). As Yavuz and Esposito argue, while religion was able to grant a sense of moral legitimacy to the reign of the sultans of the Ottoman Empire through the tradition of political patronization of popularly-based religious authorities, the laicist regime of the republic had very little ability to appeal morally to the Turkish people (2003, xxii). In Turkey, because the laicist national ideology meant functioning publicly as oppositional towards traditional religious practice, “morality or moral conduct also became the preserve of the family, the neighborhood, and the community, whereas many Turks regarded the political domain as the space of dirty tricks and duplicity” (Yavuz & Esposito 2003, xxii). Yavuz and Esposito argue that this paradoxically led to most Turks’ limiting their faith in the positivist philosophy espoused by regime to the political realm of the state, while allowing religion to grow more specialized at the personal and familial level.

The Rise of Faith-Based Movements and Multi-Party Politics

Despite the intensity of the Kemalist reforms on civil society, much of Turkish private life remained infused by diverse cultural and religious traditions of the Ottoman past, particularly in rural parts of the country. As Öktem writes

Turkish family law remained under the spell of Islamic legal norms, and beneath the ostensibly ‘modern’ layer, feudal structures and religious conservatism continued to govern rural life...[M]uch of the fabric of pre-republican Ottoman society had gone underground [during the years of the Kemalist, one-party regime]” (2011, 38).

But it would not remain underground for long.

In the period between 1923 and 1950, two forms of oppositional movements took place in response to the harsh cultural reforms of the Kemalist state. These were led by some *Naqshbandi* (written as *Naksibendi* in Turkish spellings) and *Nurcu* associated religious groups of the time. Both of these were Islamic groups strongly influenced by Sufism, the mystical or esoteric tradition of Islam, which has a rich history in Turkey. Indeed the Naqshbandis define themselves as a Sufi *tariqat*, or order, one that traces its spiritual lineage to the Islamic prophet Muhammad through Abu Bakr, the first Caliph and Muhammad’s companion. As American cultural anthropologist Brian Silverstein, who has written extensively on contemporary Naqshbandi orders in Turkey, writes, the Naqshbandi order, though originating in Bukhara, Central Asia, where the eponym of the order, Baha al-Din Naqshband lived in the 14th century, became one of the preeminent orders in the central Ottoman lands of Anatolia and the Balkans as well as the capital city Istanbul after the first quarter of the nineteenth century (2010, 68). The prominence and political activity of this order in Turkey was largely due, according to Silverstein, to Mevlana Khalid “al-Baghdadi” (d. 1827) and his successors. Significantly, “Mevlana Khalid’s view was that the piety of Muslims is ensured through the piety of their rulers,” (2010, 68) and this notably was “passed down to subsequent generations of Naqshbandis

up to the present...who did not “seek to cultivate their devotions through reclusion (even in the face of state oppression), but sought to influence those in positions of authority and power who would in turn influence those around them and society in general” (Silverstein 2010, 69). The Nurcus, inspired by the writings of Kurdish Islamic scholar Said Nursi (1876-1960), led an “inward-looking” Islamic movement whose goals were to achieve the *self-purification* and *self-consciousness* of the Muslim individual living in Turkey (Yavuz 2003, 56). According to Yavuz,¹⁰ who has written extensively on the Nurcus, the movement sought ways to free itself from state control, which was perceived as illegitimate, and viewed the importance of self-transformation and individual piety as the basis for their desire to achieve societal reform (2003, 56). In contrast, certain Naqshbandi orders “pursued a more revolutionary and confrontational strategy by leading several conspicuous anti-secular disturbances” (Yavuz 2003, 56). However, both movements shared Islam as the constitutive focus of community and meaningful social life in Turkey. As mentioned earlier, when the Kemalist revolutionaries removed Islam from the public domain, they simply transferred religious expression to the private realms of the family, the neighborhood, and community—particularly in rural areas where the ‘secularizing’ reforms were not as penetrative. As Yavuz explains,

With the loss of public space and vernacular political language, devout Muslims focused on the home as the new stronghold for maintaining Muslim morality and identity within an antireligious state...and the suppression of the outward manifestations of Islam encouraged in many Turks a deeper inner contemplation of their faith....[E]ventually, residential quarters, whether a household, a quarter of a town, or a village, became a bounded cultural whole where the local mosque played an important role [in some Turkish neighborhoods and communities]. (2003, 57).

It was the institutionalization of religious thought in these private spaces, as well as the evolution of underground textual Islamic communities—started in Naqshbandi and Nurcu circles to spread

¹⁰ I rely upon Yavuz here considerably as he has dominated academic scholarship on the Nurcu movement.

the religious interpretations and thought of their teachers through print since *tekke*-based communities were banned at the time—that helped to “internalize and externalize Islamic-based political movement” until these groups could represent themselves publicly with the emergence of multi-party politics in 1950 (Yavuz 2003, 57).

It was not until after the Second World War that Turkey, in an effort to take its place among the western democracies allied against the communist threat, transitioned to a multi-party system. The discourse of ‘Turkishness’ and ‘contemporary civilization’ had lost its appeal, and both the internal demand for change and new geopolitical conditions of the Cold War made “the continuation of a one party state impossible” (Öktem 2011, 39). Though the democratic shift of the 1950s and 1960s still left power in the hands of non-democratically elected and Kemalist-influenced branches of government like the judiciary, army, and bureaucracy, which would regularly intervene in order to keep elected governments in line, Turkey began to see many of its people attempt to represent their diverse interests at the state level. The Democratic Party, which came into power after the elections of 1950, created an alliance of social classes that would form the “backbone of Turkey’s succession of conservative democratic parties,” from the Justice Party, which came into power in 1965, to the current Justice and Development Party (AKP) led by Recep Tayyip Erdogan. These social classes were made up of “a growing bourgeoisie that wished for more autonomy from the state...and the religious and mostly rural population of Anatolia, which wanted to maintain a degree of autonomy from state intervention and attain better material conditions” (Öktem 2011, 41). Thus the Democratic Party’s policies reflected a mix of class-based interests permeated by a discourse promoting individual achievement and wealth, development and equality, as well as religious piety and social conservatism (Öktem 2011, 41).

However, regarding the Naqshbandi and Nurcu groups discussed earlier, the Democratic Party's efforts to represent Islamic interests were ambiguous. For example, as Yavuz writes, while "the DP [Democratic Party] created conditions favorable for the publication of Said Nursi's long-banned *Epistles of Light* in 1956," it also "used police force in 1959 to prevent the burial of the most prominent Naksibendi [sic] sheik of the period, Suleyman Hilmi Tunahan, in the garden of Istanbul's Fatih Mosque...and did not allow Said Nursi to enter Ankara, though some government officials attended his funeral in 1960" (2003, 62). The co-optation of Islamic groups thus varied according to time and issue concerned for the DP—as it attempted to 'liberalize' its policies toward Islamic institutions and networks in some circumstances, but also worked to prevent the radicalization of religious groups by limiting them at the same time (Yavuz 2003, 62).

Ultimately, although a transition to democratic politics had taken place and popular representation was occurring to a certain extent, the period between 1950 and 1980 was very tumultuous and unstable politically. The bureaucracy and military's continual intervention in the state's politics, from orchestrating coups to pulling strings behind the scenes, launched a lot of popular frustration that led to the radicalization of oppositional groups, particularly those of socialist and communist persuasions. Widespread political polarizations and ideological divisions between these leftist groups and the conservative, Kemalist elite left Turkish democracy weak, fragmented, and ravaged by internal conflict by the end of the 1970s, but also placed Islamic groups in a more favorable position politically going into the 1980s.

Neoliberal Reform of the 1980s: Islam in the Public Sphere

In the September coup of 1980, Turkish generals intervened to stop the escalating violence between conflicting factions of Turkish society and improve the economic hyperinflation

problem that was contributing significantly to the political turmoil. Interestingly, as Yavuz explains, the military administration led by General Kenan Evren “viewed leftist groups as the greatest threat to its authority in this period and sought to diminish their influence by promoting a ‘Turkish-Islamic synthesis’” (Yavuz 2003, 69), which was a general trend that many governments of Muslim majority countries took up during this period, like Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Iran. The government thus allowed Islamic activist elements to mobilize and took several steps to bring religious sentiment in their favor: they opened new Qur’anic courses, made religious instruction compulsory in public schools, and employed new preachers (Yavuz 2003, 74). The coup created new opportunities for Nurcu and Naksibendi Islamic actors to restructure power relations and locate entryways into the political system, and when democratic elections were allowed to take place in 1983, an openly-Muslim, third party candidate named Turgut Özal of the Motherland Party (ANAP) won the position of prime minister (much to the surprise of the military leadership who were backing the pro-military Nationalist Democracy Party (MDP)).

Özal served as prime minister between 1983 and 1989, and then as president from 1989 until his death in 1993. Yavuz writes that one of the most far-reaching legacies of the Özal years was the official legitimization of radically new perspectives on the role of Islam and the Ottoman heritage in contemporary Turkish society (2003, 75). “He used the Sufi orders, kinship ties, and mosque associations to build dynamic bridges with society, resulting in the adaptation of these traditional networks to a modern urban environment” (2003, 75). His minister of education was a well-known Naqshbandi disciple, and the inner core of his administration included leading members of the defunct pro-Islamic National Salvation Party, *Millî Selâmet Partisi* (MSP). His pro-Islamic attitude made him very popular, but so did his policies of economic liberalism. Özal

helped new social classes emerge by removing many of the state's protectionist measures, and facilitated the emergence of a new class of industrial capitalists in Anatolian cities by introducing free trade and market policies that strengthened private businesses. And significantly, as Öktem writes, as the free market policies of Özal's Motherland party urbanized a large class of people originally from rural, more conservatively religious, parts of Turkey, it also "revolutionized the terms of engagement for the production and consumption of goods and services, including popular culture, lifestyle, and worldviews," expanding education and offering new opportunity spaces for contesting notions of identity (2011, 72).

These urban spaces, formed as a result of new economic and political forces, not only provided openings for individuals to grapple with and negotiate their Turkish identities, but also allowed them to establish business and social connections within the new market economy. Particularly, as a result of new, alternative, social, cultural, and economic public spaces that were emerging because of Özal's liberalizing reforms, Islamic elements of society, mostly comprising those of the Naqshbandi and Nurcu circles discussed earlier, were able to represent themselves at an institutional level to the Turkish public and articulate their faith in newly creative ways. Significantly, Yavuz explains: "As the state's inadequacy in the social, economic, educational, and health care spheres became apparent, Islamic groups increasingly moved into these spheres with financial means, organizational experience, and dedicated workers" (2003, 81). Possessing the strength of communal ties, solidarity, and a shared code of conduct to carry out this work, these groups were thus able to establish space for themselves within a newly budding Turkish civil society, gradually negotiating place and authority for the open expression of religious identity (Yavuz & Esposito 2003, 1).

***Hizmet* as a Religiously Based Civil Society Project in Turkey**

The Nurcu movement, with grassroots and social dimensions, generally comprised the Islamic groups that achieved civil-society based influence through the improved political conditions towards religious expression in the 1980s. Their growth as a social movement was rooted in a network they created of media, education, business, and publishing establishments (Yavuz 2003, 151). Nurcu groups became successful in establishing these because they were able to incorporate spaces in Turkish life for individuals to reconcile Islamic identities with the modern dynamics of economic and social life. In order to articulate faith in a newly ‘modernized’ and ‘secularized’ Turkey, these groups did not identify as oppositional towards contemporary Turkish discourses on cultural pluralism, democracy, human rights, and market economy, but rather worked to absorb and apply these values to the benefit of the Muslim community so that a shared Islam ethic could be applied to the rapid social and economic changes affecting individual—particularly middle-class—life in Turkey. Because changing socioeconomic and political identities motivated diverse interpretations of Said Nursi’s influential text, there are presently three major splinter Nurcu groups. These include the Yeni Asyaci, the Yeni Nesilciler, and the *hizmet* community of Fethullah Gülen, which is the most influential of these three groups, and the subject of this thesis.

Though Gülen’s interpretations of Nursi’s writings and Islamic piety quietly began to take social form in the late 1960s with small summer camps designed to help high school students reconcile Islamic understandings with the scientific principles taught in school, they quickly developed into the leading principles that would guide a global, faith-based civic and social educational movement of Gülen-inspired people through the liberalizing reforms of the 1980s. It was during this period of time that the movement became deeply entrenched in the Turkish

public sphere as Gülen built a large religious network of educated and elite Turkish Muslims who established their own publishing presses, newspapers, broadcasting companies, cultural foundations, and, of course, schools—many of which are supported financially by “more than two thousand businessmen and merchants,” who aligned with Gülen during this period of economic growth and prosperity (Yavuz 2003, 36). The privatization of the educational system during this period was the most significant step that led toward the movement’s widespread and powerful influence, first inside Turkey and now globally, where the movement has expanded into over 160 countries.

The Gülen-inspired community is known for its desire to engage and improve society through what they call *hizmet*, or “service” by creatively using market, educational, and informational opportunity spaces, which have only emerged in the past few decades, to promote and express its faith-based standard of social development within a Turkey that is still struggling to develop and define its identity. The religiously motivated yet successful nature of the *hizmet* movement’s work in Turkey’s ‘secular’ public sphere call into question the boundaries and categories which constitute the movement’s identity as either ‘secular’ or ‘religious’ within Turkish political definitions. While Turkey still struggles with questions of ‘secular’ or ‘religious’, ‘Eastern’ or ‘Western’, and ‘authoritarian’ or ‘democratic’, the political and historical background of Turkey’s evolving self-definition continues to influence the movement’s evolution in composition, mission, and presence throughout the modern world.

Chapter Two

Fethullah Gülen and the Development of *Hizmet*

Understanding the thought and mission of Fethullah Gülen, the founder of the *hizmet* movement, is important when exploring the formation of the faith-based, socio-civic movement of people who actively identify with this Turkish word for “service.” This chapter will explore the personal history and intellectual influences of Fethullah Gülen, illuminating the development of *hizmet* first as a concept and then, gradually, as an identity for the transnational educational movement inspired by Gülen’s social application of his Islamic understandings.

Gülen’s Formative Period (1941-1958)

Fethullah Gülen was born in 1941 to a modest Muslim family in a small village named Korucuk in the eastern Anatolian region of Erzurum. In his biography of Gülen, Hakan Yavuz¹¹ discusses how Gülen was shaped by three formative factors while growing up: his family, Sufism and Sufi leaders, and the writings of Said Nursi (2013, 26). I agree with this assessment, as other biographers of Gülen have spoken to these same themes (Erdogan 1995; Unal and William 2000; Sevendi 1997), and will therefore draw heavily upon Yavuz in the section below.

¹¹ In terms of evaluating Yavuz as an “insider” or “outsider” to the movement and Gülen’s ideas, he has stated publically that he does not oppose the movement, but has a critical stance on some issues. For example, in his books, he has shown a critical perspective on what he sees as a lack of female representation at higher tiers of organizational leadership within the *hizmet* community and at times a lack of transparency in the movement’s articulation of its goals. In *Toward an Islamic Enlightenment: The Gülen Movement* (2013), he displays a nuanced and well-balanced account of Gülen’s biography as shaped by Turkey’s political and historical context. I understand it to be the only one of its kind in English; thus, while I consult other biographers of Gülen, I draw upon his work heavily in this chapter.

According to his memoirs, Gülen grew up in a conservative community of farmers who significantly influenced his religious interests and development. Yavuz argues that in the culture of eastern Anatolia where Gülen was raised, Islamic identity shaped the traditional culture of everyday life. Erzurum used to be a zone of intense conflict between the Russian, Iranian, and Ottoman Empires in the 19th century, and its multi-ethnic and multi-religious character resulted in long-lasting communal tendencies in which different peoples of the area would align with varying empires and take up conflicting nationalist sentiments.¹² Thus, for many Muslims in this rural region of Turkey, the vernacular expression of Islamic practice continued to be an important feature in building community, even after the Turkish state had established its secularizing policies (Yavuz 2013, 28).

While mosques and prayer were allowed by the Kemalist government at this time in Turkish history, other forms of religious instruction and practice had been banned—like teaching public classes on how to read the Qur’an in Arabic, wearing headscarves in public offices, and openly joining Sufi *tariqats* and living in dervish lodges. As gaining religious instruction was difficult for Gülen under the political conditions of the Kemalist republic, he recalls his family’s practice of Islam as deeply influential to the development of his Islamic practice and thought. Though there were few opportunities for a general state-sponsored, secular education in Korukuk, Gülen’s parents sent him to the nearest school for three years so he could complete a primary education. When his father, an imam by the name of Ramiz Efendi, was assigned by the state to a new mosque in another town with no secondary schools, Gülen was forced to abandon

¹² Hakan Yavuz refers to these communal tendencies as *dadaş* Islam, a regionalized and communitarian form of Islam punctuated by the culture and needs of frontier conditions in a zone strongly impacted by long periods of ethno-religious conflict. Due to its geographic frontier position and the presence of immigrants from the Caucasus, the cultural identity of Muslims in Erzurum gained a politicized character, with Islam and Turkish nationalism being codeterminants (2013, 26).

formal schooling and began receiving an informal education primarily from his father, who he says influenced him to seek knowledge, meaning both *worldly* and *sacred* knowledge. As he explains to Navval Sevinidi in a book of interviews entitled *Contemporary Conversations: Gülen on Turkey, Islam, and the West*:

My father was a person who filled up his time with auspicious and abundant things and a person who attached importance to thinking. He was opposed to living an empty life. He was very careful in observing his prayers...and had learned how to read and write through his own efforts...[W]hen he came home from the fields, he used to open up a book and read until dinner was ready. Those times were times when Turkish culture had been forgotten¹³ and left in the wilderness in some places...[M]y father learned Arabic and Persian in two years and improved his knowledge. Knowing what my father went through in that age for the sake of knowledge¹⁴ has made me more mature (2008, 16).

Gülen also claims his mother and grandmother helped him to realize an important aspect of his theology today: i.e., that “the seat of faith lies in the heart more than in the head” (Yavuz 2013, 29). His mother (Rafiya Hanim) who secretly taught Qur’an to the girls of the village, and grandmother (Minise Hanim) who he felt very close to, portrayed to him the ‘emotive significance of Islamic practice’—compassion and tenderness towards others—in their conduct and rituals, which they asserted were modeled after the moral conduct of the Prophet Muhammad (Yavuz 2013, 29).

Compassion and moral conduct were thus emphasized in Gülen’s familial environment, along with daily rituals and practices. He writes that the leading authority figure in his family was his great grandfather, Molla Ahmed, whose Sufi qualities combined religious knowledge and piety. Ahmed was a devout Muslim and a teacher of the life stories of Muhammad and his

¹³ By using the phrase “Turkish culture” here, it seems Gülen refers to the culture of his parents’ Ottoman past—which was rapidly being reformed through Atatürk’s nationalizing and secularizing reforms.

¹⁴ I speculate Gülen uses the term “knowledge” here to refer to both non-religious and religious knowledge. He refers to his father’s diligence in observing his prayers, but mainly seems influenced by his father’s desire to improve his understanding of both his religious faith *and* the world around him.

companions; Gülen states he was also influenced by his great grandfather's desire to live simply—by sleeping without a bed and subsisting daily on just a few olives (qtd. in Gokcek 2006, Erdogan 1995, 15-18).

Today, while Gülen insists that he is not a Sufi leader for many reasons—which could include ensuring security from persecution by Kemalist elements of Turkish society or having inclusive social aspirations for the *hizmet* movement that give it reach beyond the traditional religious initiation practices of Sufi orders—he acknowledges that Sufi ideas and understandings of the world are foundational to his thought. Gülen's exposure through his father's side of the family to Sufism, which is considered the mystical 'inner' or esoteric tradition of Islam, led him to attain his formal religious education under Naqshbandi Sheikh Muhammed Lutfi Efendi from the ages of 10 to 16. In his book *Küçük Dünyam*, which means "My Little World" in Turkish, he states that Efendi was his greatest influence in terms of establishing Sufi qualities in his life (Erdogan 1995, 27-29), and Mustafa Gokcek, a Turkish scholar sympathetic towards the *hizmet* movement, explains in his writings on the Sufi characteristics of Gülen's teachings, that many of Efendi's teachings are found in those of Gülen today. Efendi's most significant contribution to the development of Gülen's thought today was his decision to introduce Gülen to the writings of early twentieth century Kurdish-Muslim scholar Said Nursi, who many consider to be Gülen's intellectual predecessor and main theological influence.

Said Nursi's Influence on Gülen

When Gülen became aware of Said Nursi's¹⁵ writings in the years of 1957-1958, his worldview shifted critically from a "particularized and localized frontier Islamic identity and community to a more cosmopolitan and discursive understanding of Islam" (Yavuz 2013, 30).

¹⁵ Nursi lived from 1877-1960, and never met Gülen as he was just reaching his death at the point in time during which Gülen was just being exposed to his writings.

Nursi's collected writings, known as the *Risale-i-Nur* or *Epistles of Light*, exposed Gülen to diverse epistemological and philosophical systems for interpreting Islamic traditions and scripture, and attracted him to a more nuanced and open understanding of Islam in practice.

Nursi believed faith is the result of the innate nature of human beings (*fitrat*), which is “turned toward God.” According to him, “religious faith was the outcome of human desire to create a meaningful life and harmony in society” (Esposito & Yavuz 2003, 9), and therefore he sharply criticized the anti-religious policies of the Turkish state at that time (Vahide 2003, 324). As he believed that banning religion in the public sphere suppressed the best of human nature and would lead to conflict and war, his goal was to counter the Turkish state's political climate by “bringing God back into the public sphere” (Yavuz & Esposito 2003, 9). As Sukran Vahide, a prominent Turkish-Muslim biographer of Said Nursi discusses, to achieve this, Nursi did not engage in political organizing, but rather worked to offer Muslims a way of “rationalizing their faith,” or reconciling Islamic beliefs with scientific principles, reason, and logic, in order to offer Turks what he considered to be a ‘modern’ mode of thinking about reconnecting with God (2003, 26). For Nursi, as with many moderate 20th-century religious thinkers, science and religion were interrelated; he opposed the notion posed by Turkish positivists that Islam was contrary to science or that science was contrary to Islam. Nursi treated scientific discoveries as an attempt to “further deepen understanding of the Qur'an and attributes of God,” opening a new and radical reading of Islamic scripture in Turkish society (Nursi 1996, qtd. in Yavuz 2003). His Qur'anic commentaries were also different from other traditional commentaries in terms of their language and methodology. With respect to this, Yavuz writes:

Nursi utilized a rich mixture of Persian, Arabic, and Ottoman Turkish expressions to articulate his ideas and to create a common idiom among Muslims. He also used the narrative form to explain the existence of God and other concepts...[which] allowed diverse sectors of society to read and communicate his message (2003, 10).

Nursi's ideals thus appealed widely to many Muslims in Turkey at the time including Gülen, in part because of his "development of a new conceptual bridge" to understand Islam within the contemporary nature of everyday life in Turkey (Yavuz 2003, 10). Bekim Agai, a Turkish scholar who has written extensively on the impact of Nursi on Islamic discourse in Turkey as well as Gülen's educational ethic, also agrees regarding Nursi's appeal and influence upon many Turkish Muslims during this period, stating, "Nursi's position and interpretations moved pious Muslims, who had excluded themselves from technological processes at the beginning of the republic, from the periphery of modern society right into its center" (2003, 52). Because he felt the political climate to be oppressive to natural human expressions of religiosity, Nursi's goal was to realize a free and just society through a movement of inner-transformation, where conscious individuals could publicly live according to Islamic norms and feel equipped to participate in public discussions in order to advocate on behalf of their needs and interests. Gülen was very influenced by Nursi's integration of these social concepts into his Islamic theology. There were important differences, however, for while Nursi chiefly focused on helping Muslims achieve inner-purification and a developed Islamic consciousness in light of the prominent Turkish discourses of his time, Gülen believed that inner purification of individuals could only take place by engaging actively in service to one's society.

Beyond simply studying Nursi's writings, as a young man Gülen joined a community of Turkish Muslims inspired by Nursi and that advocated his teachings. This community, broadly understood as the Nurcu Movement, was structured around the writings of Nursi, particularly the *Risale-i Nur*, and consisted of a number of reading circles, known in Turkish as *dershanes*. Though the movement stressed ideas popular in Naqshbandi Sufism like deepening one's inner-heart and purifying the self through strengthening one's awareness of Allah, the Nurcu

community had no formal membership requirements, no initiation rites, and required no specific room or building to convene like most traditional Sufi *tariqats* in Turkey. Because of these characteristics, it did not consider itself a Sufi order, despite the influence Naqshbandi Sufism had on their thought and practice, even in terms of working towards certain social and arguably political principles like justice and freedom in society.¹⁶ In these circles, membership was openly defined by internalizing the philosophy of the text, and discussing the Islamic understandings brought forth by Nursi in the context of the contemporary period. The circles institutionalized themselves by purchasing homes and apartments,¹⁷ where members could assemble together to read and discuss the Qur'an as well as Nursi's writings. As a space for meetings and discussions of philosophical, social, and religious topics, the *dershanes* facilitated a sense of community within the Nurcu network, and fostered a sense of Islamic solidarity among its members. During this period, Gülen's interest in religious endeavors continued to grow and develop. Becoming an appointed, state-approved imam in 1959, he began to implement his own interpretations of Nursi's writings and the Nurcu movement's *dershane* structure in Turkish society.

Gülen's Theology in Action: Turkish Imam and Teacher (1959-1971)

In 1959, Gülen was appointed as an imam to Edirne, a city located in Eastern Thrace (the northwest part of Turkey located in Europe) at the age of 18, and served two-and-a-half years at a local mosque amongst the city's large population of Balkan Muslims. During this period, he became quite active in contesting communism while the Turkish state faced what it labeled "the communist threat," and got involved with the foundation of Turkish Associations for the

¹⁶ Zeki Saritoprak, an Islamic theologian involved with the Gülen Movement's activities in the United States, has written on the Sufi aspects of Nursi and Gülen's Islamic teachings. See his essay: "Fethullah Gülen: A Sufi in His Own Way", 2003. For Gülen's writings on the subject of Sufism, see his book: *Key Concepts in the Practice of Sufism*, 2009, as translated by Ali Unal.

¹⁷ This was also due in part to the political conditions that privatized aspects of Turkish religious life—as discussed previously in Chapter One.

Struggle against Communism (*Komünizmle Mücadele Derneği*) (Yavuz 2013, 34). Gülen's activism during this early period of his career portrays a critical difference between him and Nursi. While Gülen's religious perspective is foundationally based in Nursi's religious and epistemological understandings of Islam, Gülen believes that "inner transformation of individuals can only take place by impacting and shaping contemporary society and mastering the exigencies of modernity" (Yavuz 2013, 31). In other words, for Gülen, being engaged with one's society can help one to achieve holistic Islamic understandings of life in relation to the divine, and vice versa. He is concerned about the application of religious ideas and moral norms in both private and public spheres, and stresses a social aspect of religious life as important to the formation of morality, identity, and a just community. In an interview published by *The Muslim World Journal* in 2005, he stresses the importance of societal engagement to the Muslim individual's religious worldview:

Islam, while asking individuals to be free and independent from anything except for God, also accepts individuals as principal members of a family, society, nation, and indeed, of all humanity, based on their needs. A human being is a social, civilized being that needs to live together with other humans. In this sense, a society is like an organism; the parts are interrelated to and in need of one another. It is very important to see such togetherness as a "greenhouse" that protects individuals against oppressive forces and helps them to meet their needs and assists in personal and social development, which is not easily achieved individually (Gülen, 2005).

Thus, Gülen understands Islam to instruct individuals of their need to be aware not only of their individual roles within society, but also of their purpose and contribution towards societal improvement and development, which becomes highly important to the foundation of the *hizmet* movement.

In 1966, the 25-year-old Gülen moved to Izmir, Turkey's third largest city, in order to teach and administer courses on the Islamic sciences at Kestanepazari Qur'anic School. Still

engaged with the Nursi reading circles, he worked with young students at this school to teach them about Islamic theology. While there, he became concerned that other Turkish youth might be losing knowledge of Islam because it was not taught in the secular state schools. Therefore, with the political climate being more open to Islamic elements in society because of the ongoing ‘communist threat,’ in 1968 Gulen decided to organize religious summer camps for high school and university students, where he “taught basic Islamic principles, classical Islamic knowledge, Nursi’s writings, and ways to maintain one’s Islamic identity in a secular environment” (Agai 2003, 53). As he attracted followers and made connections with wealthy local businessmen in the community who attended his public lectures and sermons on Islam, Gülen was able to support his ideas with financial donations. He thus built dormitories for students modeled after the Nurcu movement’s institutionalized *dershane* structures, which he called *Işık Evler*, or “lighthouses.” He wanted these to provide the necessary space for university students to develop a sense of Islamic identity, a ‘filtered’ understanding of secular knowledge, and a powerful sense of religious brotherhood or sisterhood where they could internalize Islamic values of responsibility and self sacrifice through collective prayers and religious discussions (Yavuz 2003, 33). Envisioning “a new generation of Turks [with] a holistic understanding of the universe, their society, and their selves as Muslims” (Yavuz 2013, 35), Gülen thus began to develop an educational philosophy that would draw upon Nursi’s ideas about the compatibility of the natural sciences with Islam to promote service to society, or *hizmet*.

Political Persecution and Gülen’s Developing Educational Philosophy (1971-80)

In 1971, as a result of the military coup, a number of prominent Muslims in the region who had supported religious activities and lectures for the region’s youth were arrested, with Gülen being one of them (Ebaugh 2010, 28). Charged with violating Article 163 of the Turkish

Penal Code, which “criminalized all forms of activities seen as critical of Kemalism and the secular nature of the state” (Yavuz 2013, 36), Gülen spent seven months in prison. It was during this period, according to Yavuz, that Gülen determined to focus chiefly on education to distance himself from the other Nurcu movements, since they had close ties with political parties and were the target of Turkey’s secular and leftist intellectuals and state institutions at this time (2013, 36). He was released on the condition that he gave no more public lectures. Though Gülen retained his status as a state-authorized imam, he left his post at the Islamic school, and traveled to work in various Anatolian cities during the 1970s to establish more of his *Işık Evler* (lighthouses) for students.

During this period he continued to cultivate his network of supporters and donors for his educational ambitions, even taking a trip to visit and discuss his ideas with some members of the Turkish population in Western Germany. Although he technically abided by the condition to not give public lectures, his increasingly popular discourses given in private audiences on subjects including “The Qur’an and Science”, “Social Justice”, and “Darwinism” were recorded on audiocassettes and widely disseminated on throughout Turkey (Yavuz 2013, 37). The topics of these lectures demonstrate that “the goals of Gülen’s educational concept derive from the vision of Said Nursi, who believed that through education it was possible to raise a generation both deeply rooted in Islam and able to participate in the modern scientific world” (Agai 2003, 50). Gülen saw education not only as a means toward establishing social justice and a capable community for shaping society, but also a vehicle to stop what he saw as a process of decline and forgetting in the Muslim world (Agai 2003, 50). His goal during this period thus was to create an educated and elite group of Muslims whom he called *Altın Nesil*, or “The Golden Generation.”

For Gülen, the Golden Generation comprises a community that is educated holistically in the sense that it holds both scientific and worldly knowledge, as well as the ethical understandings needed to apply this knowledge in the service of society. This in turn forms the basis for the “perfect future,” which he calls the “Golden Age.” Agai, in translating Gülen’s *Ruhumuzun Heykelini Dikerken* (“The Statue of Our Souls”) into English, notes that Gülen believes, “this generation will be representatives of the understanding of science, faith, morality, and art...combining [worldly] knowledge and human values to solve the problems of the future” (Gülen 1998k, 128 qtd. in Agai 2003). Of all these qualities, the major characteristics of Gülen’s Golden Generation are Islamic faith and service to humanity. Gülen believes that only with this religious faith and the desire to serve others based upon it can science be applied in a beneficial way to humankind. As he wrote, in 1997, in an issue of a *hizmet* affiliated magazine in Turkey called *The Fountain Magazine*,

Although knowledge is a value in itself, the purpose of learning is to make knowledge a guide in life and illuminate the road to human betterment. Thus, any knowledge not appropriated for the self¹⁸ is a burden to the learner, and a science that does not direct one toward sublime goals is a deception. But knowledge acquired for a right purpose is an inexhaustible source of blessings for the learner...[K]nowledge limited to empty theories and unabsorbed pieces of learning, which arouses suspicions in minds and darkens hearts, is a "heap of garbage" around which desperate and confused souls flounder. Therefore, science and [worldly, secular] knowledge should seek to uncover humanity's nature and creation's mysteries. Any knowledge, even "scientific," is true only if it sheds light on the mysteries of human nature and the dark areas of existence (Gülen 1997).

Gülen, in other words, feels that faith in God and the desire to better both oneself and society should drive Muslims’ pursuit of scientific and worldly knowledge. In addition, learning and obtaining this knowledge is an important means towards becoming a better Muslim. “[O]ther characteristics of the generation,” Agai explains, “are love resulting from faith and embracing

¹⁸ By “the self,” I believe, through my understanding of the context it was written, Gülen is referring to the higher, or better human self.

everything that is created, as well as idealism and selflessness” (2003, 58). Gülen feels the generation should thus transform its understanding of moral values and worldly knowledge into action based on “the foundations of what human love and respect stand for and appear to be” (Gülen 2006). For Gülen then, “the main purpose of an Islamic life is not self-fulfillment or realization of appetites, but consciousness of God through sacrifices and service to Him and His creation” (Agai 2003, 58). In addition, he asserts, “one must live and act with constant readiness and willingness to transform one’s own thoughts and emotions” (Yavuz 2013, 48). Thus, this idea of service based in or inspired by faith in God to promote “good” in one’s society forms the basis for Gülen’s notion of *hizmet*, and establishes the foundation for the educational activities of Gülen and his supporters who desire to see this Golden Generation realized.

Hizmet, for Gülen as he initially developed the concept, implies that a person devotes his or her life to Islam, serving for the benefit of others, and pleasing God in the process. Gülen thus encourages Muslims to live with the understanding that all aspects of life, including education and work, should be grounded in an Islamic worldview—one that emphasizes the love and compassion of the Prophet Mohammad and his companions, the importance of helping others (he references terms in the Qur’an such as *sadaqa*, meaning charity, and *zakat*, meaning annual alms) and the achievement of *wasil*, or reaching nearness to God.¹⁹ Gülen believes working in or contributing to schools is a way of performing one’s religious duty to help others (Agai 2003, 61).

In the 1970s, Gülen and his followers began to establish an infrastructure to ensure the Islamic ‘moral education’ of their children. But they also observed, that Islamic moral education,

¹⁹ See Gülen’s *Key Concepts in the Practice of Sufism* to read about his theological perspectives on these matters.

“only in combination with knowledge—that is, secular education—could society benefit from their religious principles, because it is secular education that enables the follower to shape society” (Agai 2003, 57). Gülen thus established educational institutions such as the Foundation for Turkish Teachers (*Türkiye Öğretmenler Vakfı*) and the Foundation of Middle and Higher Education (*Akyazılı Orta Ve Yüksek Eğitim Vakfı*), and began to teach university preparatory courses so as to provide greater access to university education for the many Turks who did not have the resources to achieve entrance otherwise. These courses became popular among middle class and working class children, preparing a broader swatch of students, all of whom were not necessarily from conservative Muslim backgrounds, “to take the mandatory exams in order to get into universities and succeed once there” (Ebaugh 2010, 29). Furthermore, because of the highly politicized situation of Turkish society in the 1970s, during which the conservative government was attempting to put down communist factions, many parents chose to send their children to Gülen’s *Işık Evler*-lighthouses so as to remove them from the political atmosphere of the universities. The lighthouses were also more openly permitted during this period due to the government’s anti-communist campaigns. “Over time,” as American sociologist Helen Ebaugh, who is popular amongst the Gülen inspired community in America for her sympathetic sentiments towards the movement’s activities,²⁰ explains, “the students who lived in the boarding houses became major advocates of Gülen’s service ideas and returned to their villages and towns to spread the word of their valuable experiences and opportunities” (2010, 29). These students,

²⁰ Upon conducting ethnographic fieldwork in Atlanta, several *hizmet* affiliated people encouraged me to read Ebaugh’s book on the Gülen Movement, particularly because it discusses in detail a major point of skepticism many critics hold regarding the movement, which is its alleged lack of transparency regarding its financial resources. In her book, Ebaugh finds that the movement receives its monetary support through personal donations given out of religious motivations, though scholars like Joshua Hendrick (2013) find this too simplistic an explanation, and thus remain skeptical of the movement’s substantial financial means.

having been armed with a good education, became the merchants, businessmen, and professionals in their communities that would join together, particularly in the eighties, to support the boarding houses, build their network, and establish other societal service projects motivated by Gülen's *hizmet* theology.

The Rise of Hizmet Inspired Schools and Institutions (1980-1999)

The first two *hizmet* inspired private schools opened in 1982, one in Izmir and the other in the cosmopolitan center of Istanbul. These were followed over the course of the next two decades by hundreds more that opened up throughout Turkey and, eventually, around the world. As Agai writes, leading up to their establishment, Gülen had been stressing that “schools concentrating on nonreligious subjects could serve religious needs and that Turkey needed elite secular schools run by religiously motivated, conservative teachers...to provide ‘stability’ and ‘social peace’” (2003, 54). This went along with his idea of how the “Golden Generation” needed to be educated in a holistic fashion, internalizing a combination of both worldly and ethical knowledge. Gülen and his followers acknowledge that even without teaching Islam explicitly, their schools serve Islam because they deliver knowledge—which itself “becomes an Islamic value when it is imparted by teachers with Islamic values who can show students how to employ knowledge in the right and beneficial Islamic way” (Gülen 1997, 53 qtd, in Agai 2003, 62). This idea also calls to mind the Islamic notion of learning as a way of worship, as discussed extensively in American anthropologist Robert Hefner's edited volume entitled *Schooling Islam* (2007). The opening of the first two schools followed directly on the heels of the Turkish military coup of 1980, which was waged to defeat the communist threat once and for all, and favored not only private investment in the educational sector, but also a promotion of a “Turkish-Islamic synthesis.” As Yavuz writes, “the rhetoric and policies of the 1980 coup treated a

domesticated form of Islam as an element in the service of the nation and nationalism rather than as an autonomous force able to compete with either secularism or nationalism...[T]he military sought to cement national unity by using Islam as its shared social bond” (2013, 38). Gülen’s vision thus merged with the political climate in such a way at this time that his schooling project became viable, even if the supportive political climate eventually subsided with Turkey’s changing political conditions.

The schools were independent units, administered and funded by local Gülen-inspired people wishing to participate in *hizmet*. While they were based on a secular curriculum approved by the state and used English for instruction, the teachers within the schools were joined under the common ethic of service that Gülen stresses. Since it was legally impossible to introduce a course on religion, the teachers were meant to reflect “Islam by conduct,” or present the *essence* of Islam by acting morally or setting an ethical example for their students (Yavuz 2013, 109). Gülen feels that teachers have the most important role in establishing the ideal of the ‘Golden Generation’ as they help shape their pupils to be good, ethical individuals in society. In Gülen’s words, “teachers have the duty to fill science with wisdom so that it will be applied usefully to society” (1997, 99 qtd. in Agai 2003). And because Gülen ascribes Islamic attributes to the teacher (even within a secular setting), “being a dedicated teacher,” as Agai explains, “becomes a kind of religious merit and way to ensure that individual’s religious salvation...making it a strong motive for people to choose the profession” (2003, 59). Therefore, the teachers in these schools usually come from the most prestigious Turkish universities, such as Middle East Technical University in Ankara and Boğaziçi University in Istanbul, but they are strongly committed to the school community and welfare of their students based on their religious motivations (Yavuz 2003, 39). Because the students attending these first two high schools

actually did very well within their first few years, consistently achieving high marks on university entrance exams, *hizmet*-established schools gained a fairly high reputation throughout Turkey. Many parents unaffiliated with Gülen would send their children to the schools just because they provided the best education possible in some parts of Turkey (Ebaugh 30).

When Özal was elected prime minister in 1983 and introduced liberal economic policies, greater privatization, and a political environment that was friendlier towards religious activity in the public sphere, the number of schools began to increase exponentially throughout Turkey. Gülen had developed close ties with Özal, who, also concerned about the future of Muslims in Turkey, lifted the ban on Gülen's public sermons so as to encourage Gülen's support for his liberalist and free market policies (Yavuz 2013, 198). The economic liberalization of the political system in the 1980s enabled the *hizmet* community to gain significant influence in Turkish society, as they began to not only invest in the construction of new learning institutions and *Işık Evler*, but also took advantage of opportunities at the civil society level. The movement steadily became involved in the media, broadcasting companies, and publishing presses, thereby bringing its religious perspective into the public sphere by addressing social and cultural issues in Turkey. Its daily newspaper, *Zaman*, was introduced in 1986 to "provide a distinctly Muslim voice on political and social issues," and successfully became the fifth largest newspaper in Turkey by 2002. The movement also launched a national television channel known as *Samanyolu*, popular radio stations such as *Dunya* and BURC, and scientific magazines *Sizinti* and *Ekoloji*. Though founded out of inspiration from Gülen's ideas, these institutions have always been run quite independently by individuals, and are not particularly religion-centric. Gülen simply writes a long column once every few months for one or two of the magazines, with a focus on applying themes from the Qur'an to daily life.

Hizmet activities are funded in part by merchants and a number of business groups aligned with the movement, made up substantially by those who once were students at Gülen-inspired schools. Still, like most Islamic organizations, much of the movement's finances are contributed through the allocation of religiously mandated alms for charity, or *zakat*, as well as personal donations, or *himmət* (in Turkish), from a variety of individuals who support *hizmet*'s work. Ebaugh explains that Gülen was able to achieve this 'self-funding' method of service work by gaining popularity through turning to Islamic ideas and values in his sermons, such as duty, moral obligation, disinterested contributions, and philanthropic enterprise to support his altruistic aims (2010, 36). Additionally, unlike more orthodox Muslim leaders, Gülen felt that participating in free market policy was okay in the name of a greater good, believing that Muslims should "be wealthy and grow their businesses as much as possible, especially internationally...so that a portion of the accumulated wealth could be used to support the many educational projects that would work against ignorance, poverty, and conflict" (Ebaugh 2010, 36). Many of Gülen's business-minded followers thus established business associations throughout Turkey for people among the *hizmet* network to improve their own businesses and contribute to the movement's activities. As a result of this, in 1996, the Asya Finance Corporation was established. Supporting social and educational activities in Turkey, it is now backed by sixteen partners and has more than half a billion dollars in capital (Yavuz 2003, 36).

While the expansion of *hizmet*'s network and activities into the public sphere had a significant impact on Turkish society, it also transformed the movement itself to a certain extent. The process of going public, accumulating wealth, and trying to communicate within the normative domain in Turkey, which is diverse, 'modern-minded,' and even 'European,' compelled the Gülen movement to "moderate its voice and frame its arguments in terms of the

reason and interests of others,” rather than cater its views to solely an Islamic audience (Yavuz 2003, 41). Mehmet Kalyoncu’s work, in particular, discusses the movement’s ability during the nineties to bring together different ethno-religious groups including Muslim Turks, Kurds, Arabs, and Assyrian Christians within the communally divided Turkish city of Mardin. He argues that through its work in addressing common problems like the lack of education and economic deprivation in the community, the movement was able to mobilize ethnically and religiously diverse peoples in Turkey to tackle their societal problems together (2010, 273). The success of the movement’s social aims thus began to depend on its ability to include and overlap with the various worldviews found throughout Turkish society so as to frame its social vision in such a way that anyone in Turkey might understand, relate, and participate in it as well.

American Exile and Globalization of the Educational Movement (1999-Present)

The movement’s attempt to appeal to broader society, however, caused the Kemalist sectors of society, who were initially supportive, to perceive it again as a threat, given both its religious status and the sentiment that communists were no longer a danger to the republic. Beginning in 1997, these Kemalist groups thus worked to project a negative image of Gülen and the movement by accusing them of being Islamists, or promoters of Shari’a law within the state system. This campaign was quite successful in Turkey, and many Turkish citizens, especially those who consider themselves strong nationalists and irreligious, carry these negative sentiments about Gülen and the *hizmet* movement as well, even today.²¹ When the military took

²¹ Two Turkish students in Atlanta whom I carried out interviews with discussed these sentiments in regards to *hizmet* or the “Gülen movement” (Personal Interviews: Oct. 22 2013; Dec. 2 2013). More broadly and domestically in Turkey, one only needs to browse through articles on Gülen in Turkey’s more nationalist bent *Hurriyet* newspaper to see these sentiments displayed in most, if not all, articles—beginning in the late nineties and continuing into recent articles from 2014.

over in 1997 through a ‘soft coup,’ they banned Özal’s democratically elected Motherland party, curtailed the building of new mosques, restricted Islamic schools (*Imam Hatip*), banned headscarves in institutions of higher learning, and made efforts to arrest Gülen. After a cassette emerged of Gülen allegedly reacting by telling his followers to be “cautious” and “wait for the ripe time to respond” (Yavuz 2013, 41), the Kemalist-aligned media launched a fierce attack on Gülen and his “threat” to the secular nature of the Turkish state. This campaign virtually forced Gülen to leave Turkey in 1999 and move to the United States, a country that he regards positively for its democratic conditions and natural beauty. He remains here at present in the Pocono Mountains of Pennsylvania, and continues to explain his stay as a medical choice, rather than an escape or exile from Turkey.

With Gülen’s move beyond the borders of Turkey, *hizmet* has also traveled and been planted within different communities throughout the world, establishing itself as a transnational, faith-based educational movement. Hundreds of schools, including a handful of universities, have been founded by Gülen’s followers—from the Turkish republics of Central Asia to Africa, the Asian-pacific, Europe, and America. While globalization of the movement is explained in part by the growing Turkish diaspora settling in countries all over the world as students, professionals, and businessmen, some followers of *hizmet* have deliberately migrated from Turkey in order to establish Gülen-inspired institutions in other countries to expand their service work. Others feel a growing weariness of Turkey’s restrictive policies toward religious expression in the public sphere. Many also traveled to the United States inspired by Gülen’s move there. This process of transnationalism has not only brought forth contact between *hizmet*’s foundational ‘Turkish-Islamic’ community and other diverse cultures and faith groups throughout the world, but also promoted the institutionalization of cross-cultural education and

inter-faith dialogue within the movement as its members have increasingly begun to absorb global discourses and universalistic language to serve new communities worldwide.

Chapter Three

***Hizmet* Travels: Transnational Aspects of the Movement**

The last chapter concluded with a discussion of the *hizmet* movement's expansion beyond the borders of the Turkish state. This chapter will examine in greater depth how the faith-based educational movement has continued to develop both philosophically and compositionally as it has traveled into other nation-states and emerged on the global scene. It brings the movement into its post-nineties phase of "transnationalism," which is a concept that will be explored in detail throughout the chapter, and sets up for an examination of the movement's identity as it is expressed in local contexts, while maintaining a newly global presence.

An Educational Network Expanded

In the 1990s, people engaged in *hizmet* started to build schools outside of Turkey, and the movement began to operate in new nation-states and varying political, historical, and cultural contexts. While this began in the Turkic republics of Central Asia to promote cultural connection and "brotherhood" between all Turkish peoples residing within and outside of Turkey (Turam 2003), it later developed into a worldwide educational project, spanning across continents and cultures in hopes of promoting cooperation and common ground to serve an increasingly interconnected world. This process of traveling across borders has gradually changed the form and content of the *hizmet* movement in important ways.

Significantly, since Gülen moved out of Turkey and settled in the USA, his writings and interviews have reflected what Hakan Yavuz refers to as a "new Gülen who is more at home with globalization and democracy and also more critical of the state-centric political culture in Turkey," (2003, 28). During the anti-Gülen campaigns of 1997-1998, Gülen guided the

establishment of the Journalists and Writers Foundation, which has organized conferences, meetings, and dialogue symposiums to bring together diverse groups of academics, civil society organization representatives, and policymakers throughout Turkey in order to discuss the nation-state's problems and present solutions to them. The most famous of these meetings is known as the Abant Platform, which publicly identifies major divisive issues in Turkey through its Abant Declarations. During the late 1990s, the Platform recognized issues like the relationship between Islam and secularism and religion versus the state, but gradually, as the Platform entered the 21st century, the declarations also began to speak to issues of democracy and human rights; pluralism and reconciliation; and Turkish entry into the European Union (Yavuz 2003, 45). The declarations have reflected themes highlighted throughout Gülen's speech and writings over the last fifteen years, beginning in 1998, which have increasingly incorporated discourses on human rights, religious pluralism, democracy, and tolerance. He explains the importance of integrating these discourses, which may seem more broadly encompassing than discourses focused solely on Islam, into his theological worldview in an interview with Nevval Sevindi in 2008:

By taking into consideration what happens in the world, we discover the actions of He Who creates and rules existence....[A]s time passes, the world is coming more and more to resemble a global village; different beliefs, colors, races, customs, and traditions will continue to live in this village. Every human individual represents a whole world. It is therefore of the greatest importance to realize that *all people are alike*.²² For this reason, the peace of this (global) village lies in recognizing all differences, accepting them as natural, and not treating anyone differently because of them, which means global tolerance and dialogue....[E]very human being has pride, dignity, and self respect. As long as this pride, dignity, and self-respect, given to one by the Creator, are not recognized, it will not be possible to maintain peace and equilibrium in any nation, nor in the world (Sevindi 2008, 60-63).

The key take-away from this quote is not only that Gülen understands tolerance, pluralism, human rights, and dialogue to be values critical to an Islamic worldview, but also, more

²² Italics added for emphasis.

importantly, that these values can be shared among all people, with various worldviews—and when human beings understand this, the idea that they can find commonalities in each other as humans while acknowledging and respecting individual differences, there will be peace, according to Gülen. Therefore, Gülen believes the schools within the *hizmet* movement, should be located worldwide in order to emphasize a universal quality to the education the schools provide, and also to see these values internalized within school communities that reflect “the global village” by bringing together people from different backgrounds, beliefs, and customs to learn tolerance and engage in dialogue. With respect to this, Gülen states:

My main objective has always been to create global education [which] teaches proper moral values....[T]his organization, which contributes to world peace and creates relationships with other cultures, is admired in the countries in which it maintains a presence. You hear about the schools in Russia from the Russians, about those in Uzbekistan from the Uzbeks and Khirgiz. The schools are admired in Africa, as well. Brotherhood and universal human values are international in Islam, too....[R]eligion itself is not the aim [in the schools]....Here, young people from different religions, languages, and culture study, are educated, and admired at the same schools. Loving and understanding each other is the main principle (quoted in Sevindi 2008, 75).

While Gülen backs up this emphasis on tolerance, understanding, and dialogue with his religious perspective, it is clear that using this language regarding “universal human values” is key to the movement’s attempt to transition into global prominence. In the context of globalization, along with stressing Nursi’s notion of synthesizing contemporary scientific advances with Islamic understandings and ethics, Gülen now strongly advocates the need for *education* to build bridges between different cultures and religions. The shift in focus, at least publically, from using solely Islamic language to define the nature of the movement has allowed the Gülen-inspired community to travel, expand, and immerse itself worldwide—transforming the educational activities, popular influence, and spiritual character of *hizmet* through its newly transnational outlook.

***Hizmet* Transnationalized**

Peter Mandaville, an American scholar who has written extensively on global Islamic politics, describes the term “transnational” in his book *Global Political Islam* as referring to a range of social formations and transactions which are structured across the borders and spaces of nations, but do not necessarily entail a primary role for sovereign governments like the term “international” implies (2007, 276). As Mandaville writes, examples of transnationalism include the activities of NGOs such as Amnesty International and Oxfam, large profit-making entities such as the Coca-Cola Corporation or Nike, and a wide range of professional associations (e.g. World Federation of Scientists), religious groups (e.g. the Lutheran World Federation), and sporting bodies (e.g. the International Mountain Bicycling Association). He explains that using the term “transnational” can be helpful in examining Muslim networks under globalizing²³ conditions as it “provides a better way of understanding social formations organized across or beyond various territorial polities” (276).

In examining issues of “Muslim transnationalism,” we are asking questions about how a Muslim community of believers, perhaps even an entire *ummah*, might travel. How does the

²³ Here, I refer to globalization as the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* describes it: “fundamental changes in the spatial and temporal contours of social existence, according to which the significance of space or territory undergoes shifts in the face of a no less dramatic acceleration in the temporal structure of crucial forms of human activity. This activity covers a wide range of distinct political, economic, and cultural trends such as the pursuit of classical liberal (or ‘free market’) policies in the world economy (‘economic liberalization’), the growing dominance of western (or even American) forms of political, economic, and cultural life (‘westernization’ or ‘Americanization’), the proliferation of new information technologies (the ‘Internet Revolution’), as well as the notion that humanity stands at the threshold of realizing one single unified community in which major sources of social conflict have vanished (‘global integration’).” See: Scheuerman, William. "Globalization." *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Stanford University, 21 June 2002. Web. 8 Mar. 2014. <<http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/globalization/>>.

hizmet community, comprising a group of Muslim believers, construct its identity on the world stage while living out its principles in local, small-scale contexts? How does it engage politically, culturally, and socially around the world, being a community originally founded in Turkey? How might this worldwide network of Muslims react to the globally connected network of information, finance, and labor exchange occurring on the infrastructure of modern capitalism?²⁴ Examining *hizmet* through the lens of transnationalism allows us to observe its religious motivations and mission on a global-scale that operates beyond the territorial boundaries of nation-states, while its activities simultaneously remain contextualized and immersed at local levels. As Mandaville contends, Muslim transnationalism, reflected in the case of the Gülen and the *hizmet* movement's worldwide educational project, may represent the possibility of Islamic modes of globalization that emerge alongside and in agonistic yet constructive interaction with ongoing processes of economic integration—constituting perhaps a postmodern “dialogic” rather than modern “dialectic” Islamic movement within an increasingly interconnected world (2007, 301). For *hizmet* practitioners, this “dialogic” identity means and rests in the fact that the movement understands worldly knowledge and knowledge about others to serve as an intermediary space where disparate communities are able to coexist rather than conflict—even if one strongly identifies as a Turk or Muslim (Mandaville 2005). The movement thus argues that one who has a firm identity based on knowledge about his or herself and the surrounding world does not fear contact with others, and can enter into dialogue with personal religiosity and even

²⁴ Joshua Hendrick works to provide an answer to this question with regards to the “Gülen movement” in an essay entitled “The Regulated Potential of Kinetic Islam: Antitheses in Global Islamic Activism,” Found in *Muslim Citizens of the Globalized World: Contributions of the Gülen Movement*. By Robert A. Hunt and Yuksel A. Aslandogan (2007).

nationalism as major impulses for an ecumenical and tolerant engagement with others throughout the world.

Universalizing Hizmet through Dialogue

John Voll, a prominent American scholar on Islamic history, argues in an essay entitled “Transcending Modernity,” that categorical polarities of “secular verses religious,” “modern verses traditional,” and “East verses West” are not important in trying to understand the basic dynamics of continuing transformations of human experience within the contemporary global realities of the 21st century (2003, 239). Voll believes, in a postmodern fashion, that humanity is now entering an era in which discussions must transcend modernist, oppositional debates as they are no longer effective in shaping theoretical discourse, and Fethullah Gülen, according to him, presents faith and tradition in ways that provide “effective transitions to this era” (2003, 245). As Voll discusses, Gülen is able to do this by engaging in a new mode of discourse in which there are competing faith-based ways of life, but the competition takes place within the ‘glocal’—meaning the broader and more complex interactions of global and local dynamics in the contemporary world—context of pluralistic experience rather than within an assumed homogeneity of truth” (2003, 245). Gülen presents an example of an “emerging mode of faith articulation” in this postmodern, pluralistic sense because he does not easily come under categories of “fundamentalist” or “secularist”, “eastern” or “western”, or “modern or traditional” (in the old understandings of those identifications framed in the idiom of modernity). His positions and discourses provide a vision that transcends these modernisms in the contexts of ‘glocalization’ and ‘desecularization’—terms that point to the idea that many approaches and visions may share aspects of the concepts of secularity and religiosity rather than embodying solely one or the other, according to Voll (2003, 245). For Gülen, the era of *hizmet*’s

transnationalism has become one of interfaith and intercultural dialogue, articulated vernacularly within the pluralistic space of global interconnectivity.

As *hizmet* has expanded across the world, bringing many Turkish Muslims in literal and virtual contact with people of other cultures and religions, dialogue has become an essential feature of its activities. As Yavuz explains, dialogue is also part of Gülen's larger conception of education, as he puts an emphasis on exemplary conduct (*temsil*), rather than preaching or focusing on conversion (2013, 173). Embodying good conduct through dialogue is a constant effort on the part of believers to display their good moral character in the pluralistic spheres of public life, whether one is a teacher at a school, a businessman in a meeting, or a doctor in a hospital. Yavuz writes: "According to Gülen, interfaith dialogue is not limited to the mosque, church, or university, but rather it is possible to turn every place where people meet into a site of interfaith dialogue" (Yavuz 2013, 174). The same goes for intercultural dialogue. Gülen feels that the Turkish tint to his practice and understanding of Islam is also important to acknowledge and discuss in dialogue with others because this allows dialogue to mediate not only religious differences, but also national and cultural ones as well. While this is also an important dialogic exercise, this "Turkish tint" at the same time presents dialogue as a concept or activity with Ottoman or Turkish roots, subtly infusing *hizmet's* "dialogic" activities with perhaps a self-interested or even nationalistic identity, which the next chapter will explore a bit further through the ethnographic data presented.

Nevertheless, the *hizmet* community appears to believe that creating spaces for dialogue can serve the world in promoting shared understandings of virtues such as love, tolerance, and peace. Karina Korostelina, a Ukrainian social psychologist at George Mason University, considers the goal of this dialogue to be the formation of a common secular identity which works

as a tool for the development of peaceful coexistence between Muslim and non-Muslim groups in pluralistic national or regional environments. Importantly, as Korostelina notes, for the *hizmet* movement, dialogue does not mean accepting another group's way of life or value system, but instead offers an opportunity to *understand* the beliefs, ideas, and positions of others, as well as the basis of their identity (2010, 105). Gülen believes this is important to all societies because it is only through tolerance, which is the acceptance of differences arising through the process of dialogue and understanding, that individuals and groups can work together to improve their societies (Gülen 2004).

Korostelina argues that this dialogue actually facilitates the negotiation of a second identity through “transforming dominant identities into multiple identities with polymodal meanings” (2010, 110). In other words, this type of dialogue involves participants in a discussion of the values, needs, and traditions of each religious and/or cultural group, and imagines the creation of a “common identity” that would satisfy and respect the values and needs of all groups. “This new common identity expands people's conceptions of membership from exclusive groups in conflict to a single more inclusive group, and makes attitudes toward other religious groups more positive, even in spite of a long history of mutual offences” (Korostelina 111). As Gülen emphasizes, “Our relations with human beings should be based on being human” (Gülen 2006). Working to establish a common identity based on being human or at least members of the same community diminishes oppositional senses of exclusivity based on religious or ethnic identity—framing dialogue as a socially significant exercise that educates people about the nature of identity formation and self-definition while promoting the search for common ground. This orientation was found in Mehmet Kalyoncu's research from the

ethnically-diverse Turkish city of Mardin depicted in the last chapter and will be seen in the next chapter through the Atlantic Institute's activities in American city of Atlanta.

Thus, it seems clear that throughout the world, the *hizmet* community works to encourage dialogue in multiple educational contexts in order to promote tolerance and dissuade conflict. As insider to the movement and Islamic theologian Zeki Saritoprak asserts, , “Today in Turkey, Central Asia, and many other parts of the world, the educational institutions that were established by *hizmet* participants have continued to *contribute greatly* to the education of people of *different religions and ethnicities*, especially in many areas of ethnic and religious conflict” (2010, 178). In order to effectively promote dialogue and facilitate spaces for cross-cultural and inter-religious exchange transnationally while still retaining elements of its own Turkish and religiously informed roots, the movement has had to negotiate its universalistic, global outlook on dialogue with particularized historical and cultural understandings of its own composition as well as that of the numerous diverse locations in which it operates.

How Does the Movement Travel?

In this section, I will explore how the Gülen community actually implements its dialogue project worldwide, by providing a handful of case studies from areas in which the movement currently works, to portray how the global and local dimensions of movement are expressed in conversation with one another—demonstrating the dialogic quality and identity of *hizmet's* transnational network.

Central Asia: Berna Turam on Hizmet's Turkicness in Kazakhstan

In Central Asia, the first region the movement ventured into internationally, Berna Turam, a sociologist from Northeastern University, argues that the movement's Turkish character is highly emphasized, with a form of Turkish ethnic politics largely being realized

through its civil society projects of education—schools, dormitories, and summer camps—as well as business and trade networks inside and outside Turkey. KATEV, the Gülen community’s central organization in Almaty, Kazakhstan, not only coordinates and supervises the twenty-seven schools in this region, but also “serves as a public relations agency, a community association, and sometimes a coffeehouse for a vibrant Turkish community in Almaty” (Turam 2003, 189). Most importantly, it emphasizes pride in Turkicness, “proudly celebrating commonality between the Kazaks and Turks” (Turam 2003, 189). As Turam demonstrates through her ethnographic fieldwork, in Kazakhstan, one often hears the affirmative sayings of this celebrated ethnic commonality: “we have the same roots,” “the same mother nursed us,” and “we are blood brothers” (189). Turam asserts that these expressions of ethnic commonality are a form of dialogue, “facilitating relations with the local people, especially with students in the Gülen schools, with their parents, and with local businessmen and politicians” (189). For the Gülen community, highlighting this ethnic commonality works to trigger and transmit what Turam calls an “Islamic sense of nationhood,” appealing to a variety of Turks from different political and even religious orientations to enlist their cooperation in their faith-based educational, business, and charity projects in the under-developed region. Turam’s findings in Kazakhstan and Central Asia portray Gülen’s concept of dialogue as not only applicable between Muslims and non-Muslims or Turks and non-Turks, but also among various Turkic cultures and Islamic ways of life. Thus, in regions and areas such as this, *hizmet* communities stress Islam and Turkicness in ways that they wouldn’t in Western nations so as to recruit cooperation in educational, business, and aid projects set up to mutually benefit the region as well as the Turkish community.

Germany: Jill Irvine on Hizmet Building-Bridges for Turkish Minorities

In Germany, *hizmet* works similarly in emphasizing its Turkish roots, but instead of focusing on development goals with its projects, it attempts to ameliorate the large Turkish minority's problem of integration in Germany. As Jill Irvine writes, for the teachers and staff of Gülen inspired learning centers, cultural centers, and schools, any solution to the challenge of integration must involve the give and take of cultural understanding and mutual enrichment. She notes that "Residents must become educated according to German standards and fully capable of operating at the highest levels of German professional society, but the key to integration is to provide the best possible education, which is also mindful of Turkish culture" (2006, 56-57).

Hizmet participants in Germany have thus established a variety of educational institutions that operate throughout the country. There are three types of institutions: 1) learning centers, which offer after-school tutoring, particularly in German language, to students enrolled in German schools; 2) intercultural centers, which sponsor a variety of programs and events—like trips to Turkey, Round Tables on topics relating to Islam and Turkish history and culture, and invitations for Germans to eat dinner in Turkish families' homes—to promote cultural and religious exchanges between residents of Turkish background and the majority German population; and 3) more recently, private high schools, which offer a full college-preparatory curriculum—similar to the Gülen-inspired schools in Turkey—to students primarily of Turkish background (Irvine 2006, 57). *Hizmet's* focus in Germany thus envisions integration for the Turkish minority through providing education in both the context of schooling the younger generation of Turkish immigrants in subjects necessary for socio-economic success in Germany and promoting cultural exchange and understanding between Turks and native Germans so as to build a bridge between the two divided communities. As Irvine notes, while Islam can be a

component of this education, Gülen participants in Germany present it within the framework of Turkish culture and history so as to bridge the significant cultural gap first and foremost, and portray Islam primarily through their conduct and actions in the community (2006, 74). *Hizmet's* work in Germany with the Turkish minority, though very distinct contextually and historically from the Turkish situation in a more pluralistic American society, something I will explore in the next chapter, presents quite a few similarities to *hizmet's* work in the United States, which also emphasizes “building bridges” between two cultures.

Northern Iraq: Haron Akyol on Hizmet's Cross-Ethnic Counter to Conflict

Haron Akyol's research explores the role of Gülen inspired institutions in building “cross-ethnic” relationships in northern Iraq. In this region ridden by ethno-national conflict between the Kurds and Iraqi and Turkish governments, as well as clashes between the Kurds and other ethnic groups in the region such as the Assyrians, Arabs, and Turkmens, Akyol presents *hizmet's* educational activities as a technique for conflict prevention in the region. He argues that the university and fifteen schools established by the Gülen inspired Fezeler Education Institutions (FEI) in northern Iraq have prepared and set up the preconditions for the ethnic groups to understand each other's needs and desires to preserve their own identities through the opening of communication channels. Additionally, the educational and charitable missions of the FEI have provided, particularly in the 1990s, an avenue for the Kurdish Regional Government administration and Turkish government to begin establishing the trust and ties to communicate regarding the PKK ethnic-terrorism problem, this issue being a political interest and geopolitical concern for the Turkish state since after World War One (Akyol 2010, 331). As Akyol explains, by transferring academics and resources from Turkey to war-torn Iraq, the FEI offers itself as an alternative medium for fostering public diplomacy by building confidence and cooperation

between antagonistic parties (331). Gülen-inspired schools are working dialogically in the region to spread the concepts of tolerance, democracy, conflict resolution, and pluralism in Kurdish communities through providing education that promotes approaching social problems through collective cooperation, interaction between Turks and Kurds by organizing trips to Turkey, the teaching of Turkish, Arabic, Kurdish, and English to improve opportunities for effective dialogue between minority ethnic groups, and the space for Turkish governmental officials to support these initiatives so as to develop relations for potential political dialogue between Turkey and the Iraqi Kurds. This portrays a way in which *hizmet* aspires to be positioned in the world as an alternative to conflictual politics and a medium for dialogue, not only between individuals but also between entire nation-states.

Southeast Asia: Osman portrays Hizmet's Efforts in Diverse Cultural and Islamic Contexts

The movement also expanded into the Southeast Asia region in the 1990s, with a school established in Cambodia just as the country was recovering from the political turmoil following the Khmer Rouge genocide that killed two to three million people between 1975-1979 under the auspices of Pol Pot's communist government of the time. As Mohamed Nawab bin Mohamed Osman's research indicates, the movement participants came not only to Cambodia but also gradually established themselves in the Southeast Asia region more generally, with *hizmet* organizations becoming active in Indonesia, Singapore, the Philippines, and Vietnam as well. Many businessmen from a particular city in Turkey would concentrate their efforts on financing aid work in a particular Southeast Asian city, doing so, according to Osman, mainly out of a "sense of duty to serve in places that badly needed assistance" (2010, 293). In addition to working to aid development in the region through business investments and charity organizations, the movement also worked to promote inter-religious and intra-religious dialogue

between the numerous Muslims living within the region as well as between Muslims and non-Muslims such as Christians, Buddhists, and Hindus who populate the religiously diverse area.

The method through which this dialogue in Southeast Asia occurs varies from place to place. In Indonesia, there is more focus on intra-religious exchange between the *hizmet* community and surrounding majority-Muslim population through the hosting of *iftar* (“break the fast”) dinners for Muslims at Ramadan and the inclusion of Indonesian religious customs into *hizmet*-hosted functions, like *Halalbihalal*, an Indonesian cultural practice at the end of Ramadan in which Muslims seek forgiveness from one another for mistakes committed against one another during the course of the year (Osman 2010, 305). In Singapore, the Gülen community also organizes *iftar* dinners, but for the purpose of promoting understanding between different religious peoples in the city-state and improving the Singaporean community’s understanding of the minority-Muslim population in the wake of new laws including the “banning the headscarf in schools, government attempts to reform *madrasahs* in Singapore, and the arrests of several members of the Jemaah Islamiyah network” (Osman 2010, 294). In the Philippines, Gülen-inspired schools also bring Muslim and Christian students together to bridge divides and offer Muslim and Christian Filipino children a positive way of living and relating to each other after years of intense ethno-religious conflict between the two groups (Osman 293).

Conclusion

These brief examples demonstrate that *hizmet*-related activities throughout the world have little to do with teaching or proselytizing Islam, but principally work to apply the moral values of tolerance and dialogue through educational and charitable activities in order to dissuade conflict, decrease ignorance, and diminish poverty. As we have seen, in order to do this successfully as a transnational network, *hizmet* practitioners must understand their own religious

and cultural backgrounds as well as they understand the various locations, organizations, and peoples they are working with in order to communicate and promote these values in each particular community.

Through examining *hizmet* from a transnational perspective, we can see just how much it has developed and changed since its beginnings in Turkey, yet still observe its connection to the theological writings of Said Nursi and the political history of Turkey's foundation as a secular republic. While *hizmet* at present comprises a social coalition of loosely organized religious and cultural networks that operate at global and local levels throughout the world with as many as three million affiliated participants, as we have seen, it is important to acknowledge that the movement is also subject to changing political conditions, organizational demands, and individual understandings of the movement's values. These geographically dispersed and culturally diverse institutions retain mission statements and visions associated with Gülen, but also cater to individual preferences and localized identities, some of which are no longer tied so strongly and deeply to the memory of Ottoman Islam, Turkey's staunchly secular republican era, or even Nursi's contribution to Islamic modernism. Though shaped by these socio-historical circumstances, *hizmet* has, in the modern day, taken its own form(s), and is beginning to pave its own history, or histories even, beyond the parameters of the Turkish state in which the movement finds its origin. Indeed, my guess is that it will eventually transcend its identification as a monolithic movement made up of people with the same cultural backgrounds, set of beliefs, and interests in the values espoused by Gülen.

With this in mind, in the next chapter I examine *hizmet* in the local, national, and global context of Atlanta, Georgia. I ethnographically explore the activities carried out by the main *hizmet*-affiliated institution located there, the Istanbul Center, as well as the religious and cultural

motivations of the individual people who identify with *hizmet* in the Atlanta area. Through interviewing and conversing with local people who engage with *hizmet* affiliated activities, my research portrays the diversity of religious, political, economic, familial, and cultural dynamics that compose the movement as it continues to evolve in Atlanta, and works to paint a picture of what the faith-based, educational, socio-civic transnational movement looks like, both individually and institutionally, in a major American city located in the Southern United States.

Chapter Four

Perspectives on *Hizmet* from Atlanta, Georgia

Encountering Atlanta's Istanbul Center

When I first went to the Istanbul Center in October 2013, I expected it to look like a small, neighborhood community center—perhaps with a gathering hall and kitchen inside for community members to hold Turkish functions and Islamic festivities, and maybe even a playground outside for the kids. Instead, as I typed its address into my GPS and then arrived at my destination, I realized it was right in the middle of midtown Atlanta, in a large—and quite nice—office complex. Almost feeling as though I was heading into an interview with a large consulting firm like many of my classmates at this time in October, I entered the spacious lobby, requested the floor number from the doorman, and rode the fast-paced elevator up to the tenth floor, a notebook and pencil in hand.

I walked into the Istanbul Center, which indeed felt very much like a professional office, especially when I was greeted by Jennifer Gibbs, the administrative assistant and receptionist figure, who told me to have a seat in the waiting area up front as Dr. Mustafa Sahin, who I was meeting, finished up in an important meeting. I waited, content to have a few minutes to gather my thoughts, and noticed a couple books by Fethullah Gülen displayed on the bookshelf that presented the “Istanbul Center’s Literature.” Suddenly, I heard a distantly familiar voice in the corridor. I looked up to be greeted by the governor of Georgia, Nathan Deal, as he was thanked, photographed, and sent out the door by a group of suited Turkish men.

One of them, upon seeing me, stepped out and came over to introduce himself. “Hi... Alizeh? I’m Mustafa, very nice to meet you.” Gesturing towards the door the governor had just walked

out of, he politely apologized for his delay in meeting me. It was no problem at all, I assured him, still a bit shocked to have run into Governor Nathan Deal at what I thought was going to be just a small, neighborhood “community center.” Dr. Sahin looked like he was in his mid to late thirties. He was clean-shaven, and wore small spectacles along with his well tailored suit and tie. We walked over to the conference room of the office, and he asked me what I was studying at Emory. Of course, after I told him I was studying religion and politics, he asked what everyone in my extended Pakistani family also asks: “Oh...very interesting. So what do you see yourself doing after you graduate?” Dr. Sahin, however, being an academic himself with a PhD in international relations, did not seem to come from the point of view that these studies would not transpire into a future career; rather, he asked to get a sense of what kinds of options an American graduate with these interests might have upon leaving university. “You know, in Turkey, most university graduates go into business to be successful...[H]ere [in America] it’s different. In January every year, we [the Istanbul Center] host a conference for undergraduate and graduate students in the Atlanta area to meet professionals in the Atlanta area and develop their leadership skills so that those students interested in the social sciences, business, healthcare, and other diverse professional sectors of the community can make connections for when they finish their degrees.” When I asked him why, Dr. Sahin simply said, “Because here, we want to help students...any students in Atlanta who could use it. It is part of how we understand *hizmet*” (Personal Interview Oct. 9 2013).

Through this conversation, I could immediately see the Istanbul Center’s faith-based commitment to education, and even the wider Atlanta community and state of Georgia as I thought back to Governor Nathan Deal’s visit. I wondered, however, how a center run by Turkish Muslims managed to reflect Dr. Sahin’s inclusive tone and desire to interact with the

diverse Atlanta community while also representing its Turkish-Muslim roots amongst the surrounding prejudices and challenges of the post-9/11 American environment. In the next section, I proceed to situate the Center within the greater *hizmet* movement in the United States, drawing upon the research of Joshua Hendrick, an American scholar who has conducted extensive fieldwork on the structure and organization of *hizmet* in the United States.

Hizmet's Arrival in America

In his book *The Ambiguous Politics of Market Islam in Turkey and the World*, Joshua Hendrick declares that there is no place outside Turkey where the *hizmet* community manages more institutions, or goes to greater lengths to simultaneously promote their leader than in the United States. "Collectively," he writes, "Gülen Movement [sic] activists in the United States spend hundreds of thousands of dollars a year on events that range from 'interfaith dinners,' to citywide Turkish cultural festivals, to speaking forums, to lavish overseas tours of Turkey's conservative democratic transformation" (2013, 208). Through these activities, representatives from Gülen-affiliated institutions regularly visit and play host to elected and appointed "people of power," in city, country, and state governments, like my encounter with Governor Nathan Deal perhaps displays, as well as to "people of influence" in academia, media, and faith communities in the United States (Hendrick 2013, 208).

This type of contact emerging between *hizmet* and American leaders over the years can be attributed partly to the movement's financial and organizational structure in America. The first Gülen-inspired culture and outreach institution in the United States, the Rumi Forum, was founded in 1999 in Washington D.C. As Hendrick writes, "Widely known as the biggest and most well connected of all Gülen affiliated institutions in the United States, the Rumi Forum began with start-up resources collected as *himmət* [charitable monetary donations] from Gülen-

inspired businessmen” (2013, 210). With modest beginnings, the Rumi Forum has since become a recognized Turkish lobbying organization and regularly hosts luncheon speakers to discuss issues ranging from an “Obama Middle Eastern Policy,” to “The Kashmir Crisis in India/Pakistan,” to “Islam, Sufism, and Qur’anic Ethics,” to name only a few (Hendrick 2013, 211). Over the years, the Rumi Forum has cultivated relationships with dozens of U.S. members of Congress, sponsored visits to Turkey for them as well as other leaders in the D.C. area, and even facilitated unofficial meetings between the Justice and Development Party (AKP) deputies and ministers from Turkey with their counterparts in the U.S. It has established itself in this way through a variety of methods, like 1) awards dinners, where members of the Gülen-inspired community offer Ottoman/Turkish themed awards to specifically targeted recipients such as state dignitaries or high profile Islamic studies academics; 2) fully-funded interfaith trips to Turkey, which are designed for individuals chosen by Gülen-affiliated institutions to visit not only major cultural destinations in Turkey, but also a number of Gülen inspired schools, hospitals, and nonprofits; and 3) the sponsorship of academic analyses and conferences on the movement, in which American academics—much of the time having participated in *hizmet*-funded trips to Turkey beforehand—contribute various types of scholarship on the movement, promoting it in intellectual circles. Hendrick calls this a process of “reflexive intellectualization,” in which the primary objective is to recruit the intellectual support of scholars, though the “conferences are typically cosponsored by institutions of higher learning, involve PhD-holding scholars in the humanities and social sciences, and typically result in book publications” (2013, 215).

Though these activities were begun by the Rumi Forum, *hizmet* institutions in America are not limited to this organization and do not all contribute the same programs. Still, Rumi Forum initiatives are replicated or similarly organized by other noteworthy affiliated organizations that

include the Turkish Cultural Center in New York City; the Niagara Foundation in Chicago; California's Pacifica Institute; Houston's Institute for Interfaith Dialogue, Raindrop Foundation, Turquoise Council, and the Gülen Institute; and finally, the Istanbul Center in Atlanta—which is the central focus of this chapter (Hendrick 2013, 211-12). These institutions are the focal points of the *hizmet* network in the United States, and serve as models for smaller branches or new institutions continually being developed. In the next section, I will proceed by explaining the Istanbul Center's history, vision, and evolving presence in Atlanta, as well as its various partnerships with educational, governmental, and corporate entities since its establishment in 2002.

A History of the Istanbul Center²⁵

The Istanbul Cultural Center

Inspired by Gülen, Turkish immigrants comprising mainly graduate students and young Turkish businessmen working in the Atlanta area established the Istanbul Cultural Center under the Global Spectrum Foundation of Georgia in 2002. Many of them had arrived between the late 1990s and 2001, and wanted to have an organization that could support their needs as they transitioned into American life in Atlanta, while also providing an active Turkish-Muslim community for their American born children. To make this happen, some donated money while others donated their time. The Istanbul Center thus started out as a modest community center that offered Turkish language along with cooking classes for those wishing to connect with their Turkish roots, but also functioned as a center supporting this community's religious life, offering Sunday school and Qur'an classes for the children of these families.

²⁵ This section comprises information I received over the course of my research in the form of various pamphlets, multiple interviews, and information provided online by the Istanbul Center and Atlantic Institute websites.

Like the *hizmet* community in Turkey, the “Cultural Center” also worked to establish a professional network in the Atlanta community to help Turkish businessmen, both those living in Atlanta as well as those abroad in Turkey, make business connections in the area. In 2007, these activities “spun off” the Istanbul Center to become incorporated into a separate institution called the Turkish American Chamber of Commerce of the Southeast U.S. (TACC), which remains under the Istanbul Center umbrella. Its work has become more involved and multifaceted since the change, conducting deep industry and market research in Atlanta as well as other nearby industry-focused cities where it has established branches, such as Miami, Orlando, Tallahassee, Birmingham, Memphis, and Charlotte. It also hosts business summits, entrepreneurship workshops, executive MBA and study abroad trips, global executive business seminars, and a CEO/CFO speaker series. As its website states, its mission is to “facilitate commerce between the U.S. and Turkey and establish partnerships between Turkish and American business people” through promoting social and economic relations between Turkey and the United States. It also works to facilitate new opportunities for Turkish and American business people in regards to trade, industry, agriculture, construction, mining, NGOs, manufacturing, professional activities, and other related activities. The TACC supports a small, full-time staff in the same office building as the Istanbul Center midtown Atlanta.

The Istanbul Center for Culture and Dialogue

The Istanbul Center has gone through other organizational changes throughout the past decade. First, it expanded its activities to provide opportunities for people in the greater Atlanta area to learn about Turkey and Turkish culture through activities like the Atlanta Turkish Festival, Turkish music and dance concerts, arts and handicraft exhibits, food festivals, and Rumi

Nights.²⁶ But, its mission also began to encompass representing Turkey and the Turkish community in Atlanta by promoting intercultural dialogue, or what many in the organization call “bridge-building.” The organization changed its name to the Istanbul Center for Culture and Dialogue as it began to fund trips for people in the Atlanta community to visit Turkey and hosted annual “dialogue and friendship dinners” which brought together diverse academic, religious, and community leaders in Atlanta to discuss relevant societal issues centered around promoting dialogue and tolerance. These included talks such as “Diversity: How Our Differences Strengthen Our Community,” “1 Billion Hungry in the World: What is your Role,” “The Art of Living Together,” and “Walking in Another’s Shoes.”²⁷ A series of prominent Atlanta leaders featured as keynote speakers at these talks, like Atlanta-native and former Ambassador to the United Nations Andrew Young, executive director & founder of the Atlanta Community Food Bank, Bill Bolling, and president and CEO of the Carter Center Dr. John Hardman. The Center also eventually began to undertake educational activities with a focus beyond the Turkish-American community, and with the introduction of its “Annual Art and Essay Contest” in 2006, these initiatives began to take off rapidly. Realizing the Center could not practically be named the Istanbul Center for Culture, Dialogue, and Education, the board decided to rename it simply the Istanbul Center.

The Istanbul Center: Its Educational Activities

The Art and Essay Contest, cosponsored by both the Georgia Department of Education and the United Nations Alliance of Civilizations, was designed to invite middle and high school

²⁶ These usually hosted a speaker on the well-known Sufi mystic and poet known as Jalal-u-din Rumi, who lived in Konya, which is now part of Turkey. For further scholarship and translations of Rumi’s work, see A. J. Arberry’s *Discourses of Rumi*. J. Murray, 1975

²⁷ For further reference on these themes and the years they were discussed at the dinners, see: The Istanbul Center. "Dialogue Dinners." N.p., n.d. Web. Mar. 2014. http://www.istanbulcenter.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=category&layout=blog&id=100&Itemid=146.

students throughout various schools across the Southeast—including from the states of Georgia, Tennessee, Alabama, Florida, and South Carolina where the Center has developed smaller branches over the years—to submit both art and essay compositions based on a “yearly humanistic theme” reflective of the same or similar themes emphasized by the friendship and dialogue dinners discussed earlier.²⁸ The competition has continued to be popular into recent years, and the theme for this year (2014) was “Connecting Cultures in the Digital Age: How does social media change the future of our world?” According to the Istanbul Center website, the submissions are not judged by the directors of the Istanbul Center but instead are sent to a jury composed of art educators at Kennesaw State University and professors of Georgia State University’s College of Education.

In addition to this educationally-oriented program, the Istanbul Center has played host to many more, including the “Annual Turkish Olympiad of the Southeast,” which, according to its website, “encourages and motivates students in secondary schools and colleges as well as adult learners in Gülen-inspired institutions throughout the Southeast to showcase their knowledge and skills of Turkish language and its culture in a friendly contest and to develop understanding and respect among cultures.”²⁹ In the past, the prize for the winners of the contest has been a trip to Turkey for the International Turkish Olympiad, in which they represent the Southeastern United States in cultural and Turkish language contests among representatives from over 140 countries.

²⁸ See "Istanbul Center and Atlantic Institute Art & Essay Contest “Creating a Legacy of Understanding”." *About Us*. Istanbul Center, n.d. Web. Mar. 2014. <http://artessay.org/contest/index.php?option=com_content&view=category&layout=blog&id=60&Itemid=27>.

²⁹ See "Turkish Olympiad." *Turkish Culture And Language Olympiad Southwestern States In America Contests*. N.p., n.d. Web. Mar. 2014. <<http://www.turkisholympiad.com/olympiad-contests/olympiad-info>>.

Perhaps a little more reminiscent of Gülen’s early years promoting education in Turkey, the Istanbul Center also used to offer after-school tutoring, weekend classes, summer schools, and art classes as well as PSAT/SAT Prep Classes geared toward initially and generally Turkish middle and high school students in the Atlanta area. It additionally provided Turkish language classes for kids—mainly children of Turkish descent, as well as field trips and camps in which “students learn about sharing, friendship, and how to live in peace with others”(Istanbul Center Children’s Programming).³⁰ Displaying the importance of teachers as ethical examples in the educational system espoused by Gülen, the Istanbul Center website goes on to state that its volunteer teachers “become the role models for the students” who participate in these summer programs and “play a critical role in shaping future generations.”³¹

Over the years, the Istanbul Center has additionally incorporated charitable activities such as food drives, volunteer trips to local homeless shelters, and disaster relief fundraising, as well as civic-outreach programs such as “Turkish-American Day” in which Turkish Atlantans visit the Georgia Capitol to meet Georgia senators, representatives, and staff, and introduce them to Turkish culture through providing Turkish food and cultural performances. Through carrying out these types of programs, the Istanbul Center began to see itself as an organization that no longer simply supported and represented the Gülen-inspired Turkish community in Atlanta, but also worked as a Turkish-inflected civic organization committed to contributing and improving the entire Atlanta community as well as the Southeastern region of the United States. Self-described as a “volunteer-driven, locally funded civic organization inspired by the works and actions of scholars, thinkers and activists like, among others, Fethullah Gülen, Rumi and Martin Luther

³⁰ See "Istanbul Center Programs." N.p., n.d. Web. Mar. 2014.

<http://www.istanbulcenter.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=114&Itemid=144>.

³¹ Ibid.

King, Jr.,”³² the Istanbul Center’s official mission became “promoting better understanding and closer relations among the communities in Metro Atlanta and the Southeastern United States by focusing on four major areas, which include education, culture, dialogue and humanitarian works” (The Istanbul Center Website).³³

Shifting Institutional Identities: The Arrival of the Atlantic Institute

One of the valuable lessons I learned about ethnographic research, however, was that projects, like the very institutions they study, must change with the times. Though I had begun my project under the impression that I would be learning about the Istanbul Center’s positioning and activities in Atlanta, I was surprised upon checking the website three months into my research to see a pop-up message reading, in all caps: AN IMPORTANT MESSAGE FROM THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES OF ISTANBUL CENTER. This was followed by this announcement:

Istanbul Center has been focusing its efforts proactively contributing to educational, cultural, social, humanitarian issues and interfaith dialogue since its inception in 2002. To better achieve this goal, Istanbul Center’s Board of Trustees have decided to establish the Atlantic Institute, a spinoff of the Istanbul Center which has a renewed focus on education, dialogue, and community outreach. www.theatlanticinstitute.org

Istanbul Center will continue to focus its efforts on community service activities with its new name of Istanbul Cultural Center.

³² In this statement, the organization importantly localizes itself within the Atlanta community through invoking the name of Martin Luther King Jr., a revered Baptist pastor in the United States who was originally from Atlanta and led the historic American Civil Rights Movement. Demonstrating inspiration from Martin Luther King Jr. demonstrates how the Istanbul Center works to position itself within the political and moral histories of Atlanta and the South. And by including Gülen in a category with the likes of Martin Luther King Jr. and Rumi, there is an assertion of moral authority as well as ethical commonality that helps the movement transcend national divides.

³³ See "Istanbul Center." *Our Mission and Vision*. N.p., n.d. Web. Feb. 2014. <http://www.istanbulcenter.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=476&Itemid=53>.

The name change intrigued me, as “Atlantic Institute” didn’t imply any immediate Turkish connotations like most names for major Gülen-inspired institutions throughout the United States—but I still wasn’t quite sure why the institutional change was necessary to carry the Center forward in its mission.

I followed the link to the Atlantic Institute’s website to learn more and noticed its vision and mission were more focused on the dialogue activities originally conducted under the Istanbul Center:³⁴

Who we are: Atlantic Institute is a non-profit organization headquartered in Atlanta, GA whose goal is to facilitate dialogue and bridge cultures from both sides of the Atlantic. In order to reach a more understanding and accepting coexistence of cultures, we believe it is necessary to embrace diversity and build tolerance. We want to foster awareness for differing beliefs, traditions, and opinions. Through our other branches in Florida, Alabama, Tennessee and South Carolina, we are *dedicated to building cross-cultural and interfaith dialogue for a more inclusive society*. Atlantic Institute was established in 2012 as a derivative of the Istanbul Center. The Istanbul Center has been promoting dialogue, respect and cooperation in the community since its foundation in 2002. Now, Atlantic Institute has taken over Istanbul Center's programs while the Istanbul Center continues to focus its efforts on community service activities with the new name of Istanbul Cultural Center.

Our Vision: The teachings and wisdom of many scholars and figures - such as *Rumi*, *Martin Luther King Jr.*, and *especially Fethullah Gulen* – have an influence within our organization. We want to live in a peaceful world where non-violence, respect, understanding, friendship, cooperation and love prevail.

Our Mission: We will achieve our vision by proactively contributing to solving educational, cultural, environmental, social and humanitarian issues. As an *academic and educational* organization, we seek to provide opportunities for growth and expansion of understanding through several instructive programs. These programs include: leadership forums for university students, distinguished speaker series, interfaith events, international trips to Turkey, as well as our annual Art & Essay Contest which features works of art and composition from middle and high school students across the Southeastern United States (<http://theatlanticinstitute.org/about-us>).

³⁴ In the text that follows, I italicized phrases that I felt the Atlantic Institute emphasizes in its self-description.

From reading this, the programs and objectives of the Atlantic Institute seemed quite clear, such as its educationally-focused programs, orientation towards promoting cross-cultural and interfaith dialogue in society, and desire to follow the teachings of well-known figures such as Rumi, Martin Luther King Jr., and Fethullah Gülen. I still wondered, however, why the Istanbul Center felt it needed to make this change, and why it was redirecting people who visited its website to this one. Did changing back to the “Istanbul Cultural Center” mean the Center was going to focus on serving the needs of solely Turkish-American community once again? And if so, who would belong to the “Atlantic Institute?” Whose needs would this new organization serve? And why did the Gülen community feel compelled to shift to such a clear focus on dialogue-oriented activities in Atlanta? Finally, how did this shift reflect changing and evolving definitions of *hizmet* amongst the Atlanta community?

It was at this point that I decided to explore this situation as a shift in institutional identity—a dialogue about how the Gülen-inspired community in Atlanta should organize, brand, and associate its activities to become even more *dialogic* in character—which engaged not only Turkish, Gülen-inspired people affiliated with the movement, but also diverse citizens of Atlanta that had come into contact with the Center’s activities over the years. I therefore decided to attend whatever Atlantic Institute events I could during my research period, talk with multiple people while at these events to assess their connection and understanding of *hizmet*, and conduct a handful of interviews with people who work directly at the institutional level to observe how individual understandings of *hizmet* influence these organizational changes as they take place.

In terms of ethnographic methods, over the course of my research, I participated and observed the events put on by the Atlantic Institute and met several *hizmet* practitioners in the process, some of whom hospitably invited me into their homes upon being asked for an

interview. I could not have done this without the openness and acceptance of Dr. Mustafa Sahin, who helped me initially establish a contact base for interviews. Throughout the course of the project, he became a friend, and you will see his voice frequently interwoven throughout the chapter.

I had many informal conversations with attendees of the events I attended and formally conducted eighteen separate interviews, each of which usually lasted one to two hours each and were structured rather loosely. My main objective in these interviews was to learn about the interviewee's point of contact with *hizmet*, his or her understanding of it, embodiment of it in daily life (if applicable), knowledge and thoughts about the *hizmet*-affiliated institutions in Atlanta, and interest in *hizmet*-affiliated events. The interviewees comprised various diverse voices throughout the Atlanta area who identify as *hizmet* affiliates, non-affiliates, simply event attendees with no knowledge of Fethullah Gülen. They also included Turks, Americans, Muslims, and Christians who all have come into contact with *hizmet*, whether aware of it or not. Out of the eighteen, nine of these voices are featured in this chapter for a variety of reasons—the main one being that these particular interviewees articulately touched upon one theme or a variety of themes that came up during each interview, and using just a handful of voices allowed me to weave multiple voices throughout the chapter under section headings, providing a sense of cohesion as well as familiarity for the reader.

What about the Schools? Negotiating Identities in Atlanta

I sat down with Turan Killic, who, during this organizational shift, changed his title from Executive Director of the Istanbul Center to CEO and President of the Atlantic Institute. Upon being asked why he shifted professional positions, he told me simply that the needs of the *hizmet*

community in Atlanta had changed. Looking out over the Atlanta skyline from the Midtown office, he said:

As a community, we are seeing ourselves increasingly as *Turkish-American*. . .so we want to be more active in our local American community of Atlanta, which includes different cultural and faith traditions. We do not want to close ourselves off to others. We want to come together with our society and get to know each other so we can work together on common issues (Personal Interview, Feb. 27 2014).

“What kinds of issues do you feel you need to work on with members of the Atlanta community?” I asked. “Bad prejudices,” he responded. “In modern times, these are always related to a lack of education, and we see education globally as a continuous work. . . . For us, education never ends.”

For the *hizmet* community in Atlanta, implementing educational work has not come about without its set of local challenges, however. Though I had originally learned about the Gülen-inspired community through hearing about a few local public charter schools established by some Turks in the Atlanta area, I was not able to access these schools without difficulty throughout the course of this study. Upon discussing this with Mr. Kilic and Dr. Sahin, hopeful that they may be able to help me meet a teacher or principal, I began to understand that there was a sense of fear on the part of school administrators to identify these schools directly as affiliated with the *hizmet* movement. When I asked why, Mr. Kilic explained to me regretfully, “based on past events, they do not feel ready. . .even though I told them it was for a small research study, not a newspaper article.” I decided to investigate further, and learned that they had come under some serious scrutiny in the past couple years after they defaulted on bonds in 2012, and an audit found that one of the schools used taxpayer dollars to bring in overseas workers, finance trips to Turkey and provide unchallenged contracts to employee-owned businesses, creating the appearance of a conflict of interest (The New York Times 2012). Though the school refuted these findings as inaccurate, this massive publicity also led to allegations of the school having

“Islamic ties” to Fethullah Gülen, which served to discredit it further as a public, state-funded school—with words like *madrassa*, indoctrination, and *sharia* coming into the public discourse. The school, having been denied a 10-year renewal of its charter, is now private, and ever since these events took place, the schools have refuted any charges of affiliation with Gülen or the *hizmet* movement—perhaps because in the Atlanta environment, it is easier to deny the affiliation than to accept and explain the school as a secular institution inspired by, yet in no way legally funded or directed under, Turkish Imam Fethullah Gülen. This portrays, to some extent, that the movement not only deals with constraints in the context of the Turkish state’s brand of secular politics, but also, even while placed in the United States context, the movement is limited by public/private and religious/secular restrictions, further accentuated by public discourses and rhetoric regarding Islam in the post-9/11 American environment.

As my project sought to make the association between the schools and Gülen clear, it made sense that the school administrators were not prepared to sit down with me after having faced such an aggressive environment for any suggestion of a link between their schools and Gülen. Still, this lack of transparency is often the Gülen-inspired schools’ most common critique in the United States. As Joshua Hendrick states, as of November 2012, there were “approximately 136 charter schools in twenty-six U.S. states whose majority board membership, administrative directors, principals, and a significant number of math and science teachers appeared to be inspired by the teachings of Fethullah Gülen and connected to the *hizmet* network” (2013, 206). Beginning in late 2009, however, many of these schools became targets of criticism for their administrators’ “repeated denials of affiliation to the Gülen Movement [sic]” (2013, 206). School administrators, according to Hendrick, had, before 2009, been more than willing to discuss their relationships with Gülen-inspired dialogue centers and business

councils throughout the United States and the rest of the world, but the transparency ended when a story broke in a local newspaper in Arizona in December 2009, which was followed by two years of similar reporting at the local and national level. “Since then, concerned teachers, parents, journalists, and county and city board officials around the country have started to ask more pointed questions about the aims of alleged ‘Gülen-inspired’ charter schools and about their alleged connections to something called ‘the Gülen movement’” (Hendrick 2013, 208). According to Hendrick, as of early 2012, denials of ‘Gülen movement’ affiliation by charter administrators have now “become standard” (2013, 208). Santiago,³⁵ a Hispanic college student at Emory University who attended one of the charter schools that is part of the larger Harmony Schools charter management organization in Texas, said:

People think that if you’re going to one of those schools, they’re teaching you Islam. That’s not true...but you still don’t know that there is a bigger network of the schools...and you don’t know their motives. I learned about Fethullah Gülen through my own research when I started to put things together...[I] just don’t understand why they aren’t open about it (Personal Interview, Dec. 12 2013).

Hendrick (2013) states, “among the most lauded and most recognized charter management organizations [affiliated with the *hizmet* Movement] in the country are Harmony Schools and the Cosmos Foundation (38 schools in Texas, one in Tennessee), where Santiago attended school. The next largest Charter school organizations in the country are Magnolia Schools and Willow Education Foundation (thirteen schools in California), Concept Schools (nineteen schools throughout Ohio, Illinois, Indiana, and Michigan), and the Daisy Education Corporation (nine schools in Arizona)” (2013, 208). According to Hendrick, despite the organizational authority of these charter school foundations, they are linked through “observable affiliations that their principals, board members, many of their teachers, and in many cases, their architects,

³⁵ Name changed to preserve identity of interviewee

educational materials suppliers, and management consultants have with the transnational network of Fethullah Gülen,” which is what Santiago seemed to have been alluding to in questioning why the schools were not simply “more open” during his interview with me. What I found during my interview with Mr. Kilic, however, was that he seemed to echo Santiago’s sentiments regarding the importance of the schools’ increasing transparency in the Atlanta community: “I just think it’s time they come into dialogue with the public...[I]t’s the only way to put an end to these misconceptions and prejudices we see in the community” (Personal Interview Feb. 27 2014). This speaks to the notion that as *hizmet* travels, at least in its first generation of practitioners, it carries with it aspects of its roots in Turkey, such as an element of secrecy that was needed for the network to survive Kemalist crackdowns during the tumultuous years of government rule, which is perhaps further affected by elements of American post-9/11 paranoia towards Muslims. At the same time, however, Mr. Kilic’s differing opinion about how the schools should handle their controversy portrays the ongoing dialogue and conversation between individuals within the *hizmet* movement in Atlanta, and perhaps further afield, demonstrating how identity of the movement is being negotiated through localized contexts and situational concerns.

Encountering Dialogue at Atlantic Institute Interfaith Events

With Mr. Kilic as CEO and president, interfaith events were the most prevalent types of dialogue programs held by the Atlantic Institute this past year. I attended four out of six of these events held during my research period, and noticed that each of these reached out to diverse audiences, focused on distinct topics, and were held in varying atmospheres. In its pamphlets,³⁶ the Institute describes its interfaith programs as “designed to reach out to everyone and to enrich

³⁶ Atlantic Institute. *Interfaith Programs*. Atlanta: n.p., 2013. Print.

their lives with a firsthand perspective of a religion and/or culture other than their [sic] own.”

Going on to explain the educational and ethical purpose behind holding interfaith events, the pamphlet represents the Atlantic Institute as a religiously and culturally unaffiliated body seeking to build peace in society. It states:

These programs purposely bring people together to cultivate positive discourse and understanding with the people who make up our society. Too often in our world does violence and hatred spread due to a lack of understanding of one another. It is our goal at Atlantic Institute to break this paradigm and encourage peace. All of our interfaith events are free and open to everyone.³⁷

While many of the interfaith programs held by the Atlantic Institute were well attended by a number of Turkish-American Muslims, I also met local Christians, Jews, Buddhists, and non-Turkish Muslims at the events I attended. A typical program consisted of an evening talk called “Exploring Faiths” given by a member of a religious community in Atlanta about the basic tenets of his or her faith, or a panel discussion called “Table of Abraham” in which representatives from each of the three Abrahamic traditions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) discussed and gave their interpretations on a topic common to the three. During one event, a Buddhist convert of British heritage gave an introduction to Buddhism, more specifically, Zen Buddhism, to a largely Turkish and Muslim audience in a Presbyterian Christian Church in Alpharetta. At another, held in a Holiday Inn hotel conference room in Alpharetta, three religious leaders—a prominent Rabbi of the reformed Jewish tradition who leads The Temple congregation in Atlanta, a Baptist preacher from South Carolina, and a Turkish Imam who has worked closely with Fethullah Gülen—discussed the philosophical theme of “belief and freedom of conscience” within their own respective traditions. At the end of the event, they all agreed, “we should see each other as believers, even though we come from different religious traditions.” At this

³⁷ Ibid.

particular event, which comprised around 150-200 people, I met a handful of Jews, several Christians, and many Muslims of Turkish heritage. I also met Muslims from other cultural backgrounds such as, surprisingly, a couple Pakistani immigrants from my own family's Pakistani community in Atlanta. Many of the attendees cited having enjoyed a previous "Table of Abraham" event hosted by the Atlantic Institute that year to explain their presence. Others were friends of those who had attended the first one. Having spoken to several people about this "Table of Abraham" event afterwards, one middle-aged Christian gentleman expressed a similar sentiment among many. With a smile he said, "Look, we have three traditions represented here, which have in the past treated each other with a lot of degradation and mistrust, but here we are not fighting. We are respecting each other."

Interestingly, the more I attended, observed, and participated in these events put on by the Atlantic Institute, the more I began to understand that the "Istanbul Center" wanted to transition into a mediator between different beliefs, cultures, and opinions in the Atlanta area rather than solely embody a representation of these itself. At the same time, I also noticed that although people of various faiths and cultures from around the Atlanta community attended the programs, the events still held a distinctly Turkish flavor, as attendees were served various homemade Turkish dishes potluck-style beforehand, and Muslim representatives in interfaith panel discussions were usually Turkish and sometimes even referred to Fethullah Gülen's teachings during their talks. The presentation of these open, interfaith events thus possessed certain Turkish characteristics, and I wondered how the *hizmet* community was negotiating this transition from the decidedly Turkish "Istanbul Center" into the more dialogic, oceanic-themed name of the "Atlantic Institute."

Articulating *Hizmet* in the Public Sphere: Negotiating Tensions between Dialogic and Representative Identity

The Shaky Bridge

“Right now we see ourselves as a bridge connecting two cultures, but the Turkish-American dialogue is changing and will continue to change.” I was sitting with Rana Aksu,³⁸ an occasional volunteer at the Atlantic Institute pursuing her PhD at a nearby university, at an academic luncheon sponsored by the Atlantic Institute. She was referring to the Turkish, Gülen-inspired immigrant community in Atlanta, and how its needs and interests were beginning to shift since it first arrived in Atlanta. In order to better grasp the *hizmet* community’s dialogic goals, I had asked her about why she thought the academic luncheon we were attending, entitled “Domestic and International Dynamics of Democracy in Turkey: The Contributions of the Gülen Movement,” like other academic talks hosted by the Atlantic Institute throughout the year (given by outside scholars and academics who have conducted research on the movement), focused on Turkish politics, Gülen, and the *hizmet* movement rather than other topics. The Atlantic Institute’s pamphlet on its academic programs states its vision as seeking to hold a “variety of lectures and talks to educate the public on several issues” in order to provide “opportunities to bring people together with other members of the local community to enjoy lectures and discussion periods with distinguished speakers such as government officials, scholars, community activists, and many others.”³⁹ While there were luncheons devoted to a variety of talks, such as “Mourning to Morning: A Book about Grief, Death, Heaven, and Healing” by Mayor Linda Blechinger of Auburn, Georgia and “Who are the (Real) Chosen People? The Meaning of Divine Election in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam” delivered by Rabbi Reuven

³⁸ Name changed to protect identity of participant

³⁹ Pamphlet: Atlantic Institute. *Academic Programs*. Atlanta: n.p., 2013. Print.

Firestone, many of the evening talks devoted themselves to Turkish politics, Fethullah Gülen, the *hizmet* movement, and questions of Islamophobia, Islamic Reform, and Islam and Extremism.

Discussing this later with Dr. Sahin as well, he made further use of the bridge analogy, explaining that reaching out to others requires the Institute to strive to be a bridge, to strive to connect others, but that the bridge will always be shaky, especially as long as the Atlantic Institute is composed of people from the same cultural and religious background—but that this is okay:

We try to find a balance between reaching out to others and representing ourselves, but this is difficult. *Hizmet* requires us to build a bridge to get people from different places and backgrounds together, but bridges are shaky. We will always carry ourselves wherever we go. ...[S]o we, having started out as a Turkish-Muslim community, created programs that allow people in the Atlanta community to get to know us better as Turks and Muslims so that there is less fear and division among people in our community and people get to know us for who we are, and accept us...so that eventually, we can work together (Personal Interview, Dec. 17 2013)

According to Dr. Sahin, the end goal is simply getting people throughout the Atlanta community to work and engage together. The academic programs of the Atlantic institute thus hope to bring people together, particularly through dialogue and discussion on topics of issue in the local Atlanta community. And also, through bringing in speakers on the Gülen Movement, the Institute portrays a level of transparency about who comprises the *hizmet*-affiliated organization and how the Atlantic Institute came into being. Ms. Aksu (Rana) also mentioned that as the *hizmet* community mostly comprises Turkish-Americans in Atlanta, these programs allow it to claim itself as such.

We are Turkish-American, you can't change that...and I'm kind of proud of it. I'm raising my child not as American or Turkish, but *Turkish-American*. I don't see any problem with claiming yourself...[I]t's like you need to have a starting point. To begin dialogue, I think, it is just easier to introduce your culture, *yourself*. And now the movement has grown here and is still growing. Now we have connections and we don't have to only talk about Turkey...[W]e're building and we're investing in [other] people (Personal Interview, March 7 2014).

For affiliates of the Atlantic Institute, dialogue and representation do not have to be in conflict. As Ms. Aksu said, honest representation of one's self is actually a key starting point for the dialogue that *hizmet* espouses. And for many members of the Gülen-inspired community in Atlanta, much of the dialogue begins while raising one's children.

Multigenerational Influences on the Movement

A common theme throughout many of my interviews with the Turkish, Gülen-inspired community in Atlanta echoed Ms. Aksu's point about raising the next generation's children as both American and Turkish, and how this will affect the *hizmet* movement in the future.

Altan and Tuba Kalayci, a Turkish couple with two young children at four and two years of age, expressed that one of the community's goals at this time was also to provide a bridge between two generations, between Turkish immigrant parents and their American-born children. Mr. Kalayci articulated that he feels it is important to raise his kids with an Islamic system of ethics and certain Turkish values he grew up with, like hospitality towards others. Furthermore, he explained to me that compared to him and Mrs. Kalayci (Tuba), his children have more natural capacity through school and school activities to engage with the wider community and build diverse friendships to portray to others that they are "good Muslim."

Just living here in America peacefully as religious Muslims is itself a very important work in this country. I met a woman a couple weeks ago, about 60-70 years of age, who is my project manager, and she told me she had never met a Muslim before. I was kind of surprised to hear that, how come, in the entire life, you haven't met a Muslim! So that's what we're trying to break...[I]n future, maybe everyone will have a Muslim friend from high school or university and they will understand each other and respect each other. That's, I think, how you can establish a peace here...[P]eople need to understand each other. While being here, we want to raise our kids as *good Muslims* for this reason, so we are establishing organizations like schools or Istanbul Center to help them live with good values and engage with other people. We want to have this structure organization like Istanbul Cultural Center and Atlantic Institute around us so that we can both meet the needs of our own children and community while also getting engaged with other people as well (Personal Interview, February 22 2014).

For Altan and Tuba Kalayci, supporting the Atlantic Institute, Istanbul Cultural Center, and even the Gülen-inspired school their children attend in the area helps them feel as though their children not only have a community of like-minded people they can grow up with through an Istanbul Cultural Center institution, but also the opportunity through their school, which recruits a diverse body of students all over the Alpharetta area, to reach out and build friendships with other Atlantans. On choosing the Gülen-inspired school in Alpharetta as opposed to another school in the Atlanta area, Ms. Kalayci explained that it wasn't just a decision based on diversity. The decision was based on the school's designation as a school for "gifted and talented children," but also a little bit on fear, perhaps a motherly fear to ensure the safety and care of one's children in an uncomfortable surrounding environment.

We were living in Forsyth county and the school we were considering was in South Forsyth county, probably the best of the state, but a couple of our friends, not from the same community, but friends in the sense that they are immigrants too, they said that the school had little diversity, and their kids were made fun of because of their names, their backgrounds, and even the food they brought from home. I was just scared....[I] did not know that it would actually happen but I didn't want it to happen anyways. The school here...concentrates on gifted and talented students, and both [my] kids...ranked in the top 90-99.9 percent....[S]o I did not want them to go to a regular school (Personal Interview, February 22 2014).

For Dr. Sahin, because he understands that the majority of those who support the Istanbul Center and Atlantic Institute are currently Turkish immigrants like himself with young children, and thus he empathizes with the *hizmet* community's dominant requests for Turkish types of community support from the Center. At the same time, however, he also believes that bridging the cultural gap between Turkish immigrant parents and their American-born children is not something the Gülen-inspired community should have to prioritize as much, especially at the

eventual point in time when Gülen passes on, his American children are grown up, and the Atlantic Institute has developed further and branched out into the Atlanta community.

For us, providing services like Turkish language or cooking classes is just to serve the needs of the community. We follow what they want, and work to address the problems relevant to the daily life of people in the *hizmet* community here. But to me, the name change to Atlantic Institute makes sense. Our children are not Turkish, but American. The important thing to me is that they have *good values*, not that they can speak Turkish extremely well. *Hizmet* is about looking deeply into one's soul and improving the individual self...but as long as Gülen is there, Turkish references will always be part of the movement. Gülen, however, represents the first generation of the *hizmet* community in America, but he maybe doesn't represent the second as much...[O]ur children will build their own *hizmet*, and engage in interfaith dialogue, education, and other service work as it makes sense for their community's needs in the future (Personal Interview, Dec. 17 2013).

Thus, in making a transition to the Atlantic Institute, Dr. Sahin suggests the *hizmet* community may be signaling that it no longer solely serves a cultural, communal purpose for an immigrant community, and is, in making this shift, demonstrating a desire to engage more openly and inclusively with American society, claiming a Turkish-American identity for parents and children alike.

Transatlantic Exchange

The Atlantic Institute has taken on the Istanbul Center's role of sponsoring trips to Turkey for members of the Atlanta community to participate in intercultural exchange and foster a greater understanding of the Turkish community that exists in Atlanta to serve as a foundation for establishing dialogue. The Atlantic Institute pamphlet states,

Our goal is to foster long lasting and mutually beneficial relationships between the communities in Turkey and the United States. With a combination of the workshops, international travel, and follow-up presentations, this program teaches participants [specially invited scholars, religious leaders, and distinguished members of the Atlanta community] about Turkish-related issues, such as Turkey's political position in European and global contexts, women's issues, Islam and religion, economic affairs, arts, and

architecture, and encourages them to incorporate these issues into their curriculums, professional activities, and leadership roles.⁴⁰

With groups typically composed of no more than twelve people, including volunteers from the Atlantic Institute, the program not only takes participants to a variety of prominent historical, cultural, and religious sites like the *Hagia Sophia*, *Grand Bazaar*, and Turkish Parliament, but also introduces them to local Turkish families interspersed throughout different cities in the country as well as *hizmet*-affiliated hospitals, universities, and non-profits.

I interviewed two local Atlantans, both of whom became advisory board members to the Atlantic Institute after having participated in a “transatlantic trip” sponsored by the Istanbul Center. Neither of them is Turkish or Muslim.

Dr. John Ford, retired vice president and dean of campus life at Emory University and practicing Catholic, went on a trip to Turkey in 2012 through the Istanbul Center with a group of educators in the Atlanta area comprising administrators and faculty from Georgia State and some from Emory. He told me that someone suggested he find out about the Istanbul Center and its trips to Turkey (at the time) after he had been engaged for several years with the Journeys of Reconciliation Program, offered through Emory’s Office of Religious Life, which takes students and faculty to different places throughout the world where certain groups and organizations are working to bring people with histories of conflict and misunderstanding together for reconciliation, like Northern Ireland, Native American reservations in the United States, South Africa, and India. After traveling to Turkey and meeting Dr. Sahin, who led the trip, he was asked to join the Istanbul Center Board, and now, two years later, he sits on the board for the

⁴⁰ Atlantic Institute. *Transatlantic Exchange*. Atlanta: n.p., 2013. Print.

Atlantic Institute. He explained to me that while his trip to Turkey through the Istanbul Center had an educational focus in the sense that the participants mainly looked at and engaged with upcoming universities in Turkey, for him, the trip was an educational experience itself.

Because the trip brought Dr. Ford to join the advisory board of the Atlantic Institute, I asked him if while he was on the trip, there was any element of faith or interfaith dialogue emphasized in addition to education in Turkey. He told me that religion actually was not directly emphasized very much on the trip, and felt Turkey's "modern" elements within its predominantly Muslim historical and demographic context were a key takeaway for many participants on the trip.

Religion was not emphasized very much on that trip...it was really focusing on the educational innovations and advancements in Turkey. That was the focus of the trip. However, we were given an orientation before we went on the trip about the history and culture of Turkey, and, you know, we were made aware of the fact that Turkey is predominantly a Muslim country. So we knew we were in the context of a faith tradition, and we visited some mosques, but, other than visiting and looking at the history of the mosques in the context of Ottoman history....[W]e spent more time in universities and looking at these new university facilities....[I]t is amazing how many new campuses there are in Istanbul, particularly that are being built with essentially private money, not government money. And they are teaching university level subjects, graduate level and professional subjects...public health, medicine, law, and this is quite an impressive advance to see so many new universities...and *quite modern*, if you know what I mean. The architecture was modern, the curriculum was modern, and those of us in the United States, we didn't have an accurate picture of modern Turkey, and I think that was one of the most enlightening and important things for us to learn, that the advances there are quite phenomenal. And they are *on par* with any Western, industrialized country as far as educational, scientific advances (Personal Interview, Feb. 17 2014).

As his thoughts about modern education in Turkey called to mind prominent ideas espoused by Said Nursi and Gülen about reconciling secular forms of education and scientific curriculums with Islamic practices and values, I pushed a bit further regarding religious elements of the trip and asked whether he had heard of Fethullah Gülen while traveling through Turkey. He said he had indeed heard of Gülen while on the trip, but that his teachings were not emphasized in a

direct fashion to trip participants. Rather, Ford explained, they may have been woven into the trip's fabric through inter-religious elements and aspects of the trip's composition.

Yes, [Gülen's] name came up and many of the books he has written were available to us, but we didn't go into a lot of detail about Gülen himself or his teachings, per se. However, having said that, one of the principles of Gülen's thinking is that he himself says that the emphasis that people place on him is misguided, and that's why some people refer to it [the Gülen-inspired community] as the *hizmet* movement and not the Gülen movement, because he believes that for this to be a valid movement, that everyone is part of the movement and it shouldn't be focused on him but the community, and the bottom-up role of community members and democratic governance to value service and value the good of the community....[S]o that's why we didn't focus so much on him (Personal Interview, Feb 17 2014).

In the comments above, Dr. Ford, an outsider to the movement before he joined the trip, shows an understanding of Gülen that is very similar to that of many Turkish-Muslims I have talked to about the type of leadership Gülen has when it comes to people who are inspired by him and his notion of *hizmet*. Dr. Ford's tone seemed almost that of an insider, portraying an inclusive quality to the movement through his use of descriptive phrases such as “democratic governance,” “service,” and “valuing good.” He went to explain the inter-faith aspects of the trip and how they might fit into the greater philosophy of *hizmet*:

The trip was focused on what institutions and governments should do to make a better society and address some of the problems in society. That's part of the philosophy, and I think somebody who helped organize our trip made a point of trying to get the group composition on our trip, even though it [our trip] was focused on education, to include Jews, Muslims, and Christians. Nobody asked us what was our religion, but I think they wanted to have a diverse group....[I]n the *hizmet* movement in Atlanta, there is a very strong emphasis on people of different religions coming together to serve the common good. So the fact that I'm a Christian and somebody else might be Jewish, and someone might be Muslim, and someone might be another religion, is actually significant in that no one is trying to get the other one to switch religions or even to understand the deep part of the other one's religion. It's that we all have our own religions, but we can work together and share common values of making a better society for everybody, and focus on community problems that we all think are important...like educating young people, fighting drugs, fighting poverty, fighting all these problems, even though we come from different religions. On the trip, we never talked about religion, but values, and not necessarily religious values, but community values, were sort of woven through everything (Personal Interview, Feb. 17 2014).

Here, Dr. Ford tapped into language revolving around a common ethic, for instance, “working together to serve the common good”—language that the Istanbul Center, Atlantic Institute, and many Gülen-inspired Turkish-Muslims use as well. Feeling this, I decided to ask, “Would you say that you participate in *hizmet* or did participate by being on this trip?”

Ford barely paused before responding:

“I think so, I think so, because I *share the values* of everyone else that was on the trip and everybody I’ve met through the Atlantic Institute and Istanbul Center since then. You know, the *value of education*, the *value of people from different walks of life coming together to solve problems*, and I give Mustafa [Dr. Sahin] credit, he has invited me and my wife to the “breaking of the fast” dinners during Ramadan at people’s houses, where people of different faiths have been at those dinners, and often the Istanbul Center and Atlantic Institute include U.S. government officials in those meetings because that is another dimension of this whole movement. If we all come together from different religious backgrounds, or even no religious background at all, like agnostics or atheists, if people come from different backgrounds and work on common community problems, then that effort or interest can be realized through democratic governance. So by bringing to those local and state-wide government legislators, it’s a way of saying *we all share these values*, and, by the way, you all who are making the laws, hopefully, you’ll *work with us* and make the laws consistent. Getting democracy to work for these values is also part of the *hizmet* movement, *in my opinion*. And again the Atlantic Institute and Istanbul Centers don’t teach this or say this is what you should believe, but they try to bring the different elements together so that they can realize this and come to these conclusions themselves (Personal Interview, Feb. 2014).

My conversation with Dr. Ford really illuminated how I was beginning to understand the *hizmet* movement in Atlanta. Starting with a cross-cultural trip that did not directly do or say anything particularly religious, the Istanbul Center had invited a prominent figure in the Atlanta area like Dr. Ford to participate in and articulate its mission of bringing people together across the Atlanta community to agree upon common values and work towards solving certain problems by getting local lawmakers involved. Dr. Ford, an African American, Catholic educator felt very committed to what he understood to be the *hizmet* community’s goals and undertakings in the Atlanta

community. This speaks to its ability to not only establish dialogue among different types of people, but also potentially include people who are not Turkish or Muslim into the *hizmet* community's projects goals in Atlanta.

Garreth Young, a middle-aged British-American Buddhist convert and businessman in Atlanta, came to the Istanbul Center's transatlantic trips to Turkey after having met Kemal Korucu while working with an interfaith group in Atlanta called World Pilgrims. He also emphasized similar themes regarding group composition, dynamic, and the mission of the Istanbul Center in Atlanta. During my interviews with people among the *hizmet* community in Atlanta, many encouraged me to speak with Mr. Young, as he had become well known for having asked, upon completing his trip, how he could get involved with *hizmet*. Having participated in a trip specifically focused on interfaith dialogue unlike Dr. Ford, Mr. Young was particularly inspired by the social elements of *hizmet's* work which he was exposed to in Turkey and wanted to see the same kind of work taken up by Americans:

It was a transformational trip. With an inter-faith focus, we on the trip, in addition to visiting all the great sites in Turkey, traveled to visit several *hizmet* organizations. We went to a school, a university, a hospital, a social justice nonprofit, and a TV station, all funded and established through *hizmet*. This was amazing because you just had this group of businessmen in Turkey who realized the system was broken, and decided to put their money towards create a better system for welfare in their society. To see that work was truly amazing. I came back to America noticing what is broken in our society, and realized that *hizmet* could be possible here too, and that it could work because I had just seen it work in Turkey (Personal Interview, March 2014).

For Mr. Young, *hizmet* revolves around "fixing what is broken" in one's society through self-sacrifice, and he feels that it is inspirational to him because this can only occur through destroying one's ego to some extent, which is a concept that he has internalized deeply through his practice of Buddhism over the years. Beginning to attend fundraising dinners and speak at Atlantic Institute events while being involved on the board of the institution, Mr. Young stated,

“[I] am in the process of getting involved with *hizmet* here in Atlanta....[I]n my mind, Buddhism and *hizmet* are fundamentally tucked into the same fabric” (Personal Interview, March 2014).

Though on a deeper theological level, there are significant points of departure between Buddhist and Islamic understandings with respect to ideas of the self and its relationship to the divine, Mr Young’s statements here portray the deep level to which *hizmet* activities and the *hizmet* community have influenced his own religiosity and his application of it in Atlanta.

Hizmet: “Beyond Creed or Culture”?

The identities of people who practice *hizmet* are always being negotiated and renegotiated, enmeshed in distinct social and cultural fibers that travel and change temporally as well as spatially. The institutions that work to embody *hizmet* in the United States similarly are continually constructed and evolving, ephemeral bridges that connect islands of weakening political diasporas, introduce disparate cultures, and lead bounded religious communities to the global frontier. The Atlantic Institute and Istanbul Cultural Center in Atlanta will continue to change and evolve, going through phases of strength and weakness as people and cities invariably do throughout time. The idea of *hizmet*, however, may continue to last on, even if it’s articulated in different ways and through distinct tongues. As Dr. Sahin said to me, “The institutions look big, but *hizmet*’s really about improving the self, or the soul.” I asked everyone I interviewed who felt they participated in *hizmet* what it individually meant to him or her. Service, sacrifice, compassion and love were common themes to everyone’s story; religious creed, nationality, and culture were not.

Jennifer Gibbs, the administrative assistant at the Atlantic Institute, comes out of a Christian background and is from the Atlanta area. She said that for her, *hizmet* means acting selflessly and doing what comes out of one’s heart:

Hizmet directly translates to service. For me, it means acting selflessly towards others, kind of like doing what your heart tells you to do. It is not about projecting your own beliefs onto others. Even though it absolutely came out of an Islamic background, I don't think it's tied to any tradition. It has values that many different people can agree upon....[I] am one of those people (Personal Interview, Feb 27 2014).

Mr. Korucu explained that for him, it means performing positive action through forming a “spiritual corporation” made up of individuals that give for the sake of God. Though he stated there was no Islamic or Turkish requirement, he saw it personally as a faith-based practice and a manifestation of the “greater Jihad,” which is the lifelong effort of Muslims to remove the obstacles between themselves and Allah through “seeing Him in all things.” Mr. Kalayci too referred to *hizmet* as an effort to please God and live like the Prophet Muhammad, embodying a kind disposition and conduct toward others that becomes “more continuous than prayer.” Mrs. Kalayci and Mr. Young, though one is Muslim and the other is Buddhist, both saw *hizmet* as a system that could help one live out spiritual goals, like giving *zakat* or stepping outside one's ego, by “doing good efficiently” and “fixing what is broken” through its large network of people. Ms. Aksu said that one of the things that originally drew her to the *hizmet* movement was its openness. “You don't have to be a Muslim, or you could be a Muslim and you don't have to be practicing. It's open to *anyone* who is *willing* to participate, who is *willing* to help other people in different ways. It's not restricted to the Muslim community or Turkish community” (Personal Interview, Mar. 7 2014).

Though the *hizmet*-affiliated community in Atlanta is still mainly composed of Turkish-Muslims, it is transitioning as the examples of John Ford, Garreth Young, Jennifer Gibbs, and others show. Its all-American board and the diversity of participants in the Atlantic Institute's programs portray its efforts towards localizing itself in the Atlanta community and establishing an openness and inclusivity that makes it difficult to distinguish exactly what it means anymore

to “identify” or “affiliate” with the movement politically, culturally, socially, or religiously. Attendees of Atlantic Institute events much of the time had never heard of the name Fethullah Gülen or were just for the first time learning about Turkish culture and Islam, yet many of them still agreed upon messages of bringing people together, working towards seeing common values realized, and promoting education and tolerance—potentially demonstrating that *hizmet* might one day offer an eventual bridge beyond interfaith dialogue to an interfaith version of *temsil*, or “good conduct,” overcoming the deficits of inter-faith practice through an emphasis on shared “service.” While this won’t come without its challenges, for example, how the *hizmet* community will go on to engage in Atlanta as divisive politics in Turkey continue to target Fethullah Gülen and the movement’s schools in Turkey or how it deals with the public eye when two of its remaining public charter schools in Atlanta negotiate the upcoming charter renewals in 2016, *hizmet*’s identity is being opened up to an ongoing American dialogue. This dialogue will bring out the movement’s ability transnationally to portray the messiness of boundaries between such modernist dichotomies as ‘public’ and ‘private,’ ‘secular’ and ‘religious,’ and ‘eastern’ and ‘western’ through its dialogical activities, public presence, as well as its internal restructuring within the Atlanta community. Only time will tell what activities, boundaries, representatives, and discourses *hizmet* will continue to embody as it travels, mapping new territory as it intersects more borders and transcends new frontiers in Atlanta and further afield.

Conclusion

The *hizmet* movement will continue to cross borders and push boundaries, not only externally as its transnational qualities suggest, but internally also, as its dispersed participants negotiate between articulating global and local values, old and new generations, and secular and religious qualities, all while remaining rooted historically in a Turkish national culture, and deconstructing bounded identities of Islamic and secular selfhoods in the modern world.

As we have seen, the movement has grown from a small, piety based assertion of Islamic identity led by Fethullah Gülen within a modernizing Kemalist Turkey, to a transnational, educational, socio-civic movement that has incorporated neo-liberal discourses of human rights, dialogue, tolerance, and pluralism. Gülen, the inspiration for the movement, has also retreated from Turkey into the Pennsylvanian mountains of North America. With these changes, the movement has established and expressed itself in different ways, creating institutions with diverse mission statements catering to the distinct places in which it operates, yet retaining similar visions of a world beyond poverty, conflict, and ignorance. Individuals work to express *hizmet* through conduct and dialogue, and their personal faith-based understandings of *hizmet* as holy or ethical work are unique and situated in personal histories, local cultures, and even political contexts.

Over the years, the identity of the movement has changed and is continuing to evolve and develop. *Hizmet*'s activism is no longer simply about "articulating faith in secular Turkey" or even establishing an "elite group of educated Muslims" through new schooling systems as I discussed in the first and second chapters; it also has become about promoting dialogue through new mediums as the movement has extended outside of Turkey, and "building bridges," where it can. While the *hizmet* community does not identify itself as an Islamist political organization, an

Islamic reform movement, or a Sufi order with Fethullah Gülen as its sheikh or charismatic leader, the movement is interesting in that it contains aspects of these identifying characteristics in a variety of ways, yet ultimately cannot be defined solely or simplistically by any one of them.

Politically, my research demonstrates that the movement emerged out of Nursi's call to "bring Islam into Turkey's public sphere." While this did not mean establishing a theocratic government in Turkey based upon interpretations of Islamic political organization for Nursi or Gülen, it did mean working towards a political society that openly allowed the expression of Islam and encouraged certain political principles, such as justice and freedom, through a discourse centered around the societal influence of Islamic practice and virtues. While the term "Islamist" generally implies a "top-down," regime change into theocratic governance, the *hizmet* movement's grassroots activities to influence changes in civil society through its popular-base still present a form of Muslim politics, and perhaps an alternate form of understanding Islamism as a political phenomenon. Even in examining the activities of the Atlantic Institute and Istanbul Center in Atlanta, the movement's desire to make contact with the Georgia State Senate and recognize figures such as Governor Nathan Deal and Ambassador Andrew Young present an aspiration not only to negotiate the transition for Turkish immigrants into a new culture and political way of life, but also to politically authorize itself and establish a sense of legitimacy as a Muslim majority group within American structures of power and organization. While this does not give the movement an "Islamist" definition per se, it still suggests there are forms of faith-based, identity politics at play within the *hizmet* movement.

Whether or not this is an Islamic reform movement is another question that is not fully clear. While most Gülen-inspired people who are Muslim feel that internalizing Gülen's concept of *hizmet* and participating in *hizmet* affiliated activities such as schools, dialogue events, and

charity functions allows them to feel more in touch with their religious faith, practitioners of *hizmet* make it clear that they do not see their role within the movement as directly teaching or proselytizing Islam. In observing and discussing the Atlantic Institute's dialogue events throughout my research, it was clear that the point was to facilitate dialogue, mutual respect, and understanding amongst different types of people, rather than to bring about a reformation of Muslims or teach about a new type of Islamic order. Still, it is important to note that while Islamic teaching or schooling was not directly or clearly stated (beyond the sharing of traditions and interpretations of the Qur'an and holy scripture in interfaith contexts), the movement as I observed it in Atlanta seemed, in some ways, to represent Muslims as a whole under a Turkish-Islamic, Gülen-inspired appearance. While the majority of Muslims at Atlantic Institute events were Turkish Muslims, it was interesting that the Muslim representative in the context of interfaith dialogue always had a Turkish background, and usually had personal ties to Gülen-affiliated institutions. In this sense, I felt the movement had a reformist tint, particularly responsive to its location in post 9/11 America with its continual invocations of the importance of tolerance, dialogue, and non-violence on its website and in interfaith settings—which worked to establish its moral authority in the region to a certain extent.

A last question on the definition of the movement regards its Sufi characteristics and the significance of Gülen's lifetime to the movement's continuation. While Gülen as well as many Gülen inspired people affirm the influence of Naqshbandi Sufism as foundational to Gülen's Islamic worldview and the concept of *hizmet*, the movement simultaneously distances itself from being identified as a Sufi movement. Though this may have a lot to do with Turkish political histories of secularization reforms as well as the limiting aspects of traditional, culturally and locally informed Sufi initiation rituals for the now globally present movement, there remain

questions about whether *hizmet*'s emphasis on pleasing God through service is based on esoteric Islamic notions of love and “purifying the heart”—which allow it to be classified as a Sufi order of a newer form, a neo-Sufi movement perhaps. Additionally, one must wonder about the extent to which Gülen has influence over the movement's continued growth and development, and its emphasis on themes like dialogue, tolerance, and human rights, which Gülen has been known to focus on in his more recent writings and speeches since the beginning of the 21st century. The ambiguous membership coupled with somewhat structured institutions that surround the movement evoke questions about where Gülen stands in terms of organizational influence beyond the simple inspiration most, if not all, practitioners of the movement discussed when I asked about Gülen.

These questions in themselves portray the blurring and confusing boundaries between the seemingly static terminologies popular discourse employs to describe the movement, further demonstrating the movement's ability to travel between modernist categorical identities and express the nuances and complexities necessary to understanding a “transnational Islamic movement of the modern age.” The individuals, who comprise the movement by embodying and articulating *hizmet* in distinctive ways and varying socio-political contexts, ultimately transcend assumptive divisions of modern and traditional, religious and secular, and East and West—because humans, as Abu-Loghod wrote, encompass multiple selfhoods and perspectives. They cannot be simply and reductively labeled “eastern” or “western,” “religious” or “secular,” “modern” or “traditional”—and because social movements consist of individuals, *hizmet* cannot be limited to these binaries either.

My research points to *hizmet*'s evolving and transitioning self-definition as its first generation of participants have traveled from Turkey into new and diverse locations like United

States, and are beginning to situate themselves within these new local contexts while maintaining global, yet Turkish based, perspective. While this has opened up a great deal of dialogue, both internal and external to the movement, about what it should look like as the movement continues to grow and develop in America as external political and social factors change, I believe my research points toward a distancing of the transnational movement from Turkish politics, and the movement's further localization into American cities. As *hizmet* continues to expand throughout the United States and Atlanta particularly, I feel that this is exemplified by the importance *hizmet*-affiliated Turkish immigrants gave to building the next generation of "Turkish-Americans." It is also demonstrated through their support for beginning projects that emphasize *Atlantic exchange* within Atlanta and the American Southeast next to *transatlantic exchange*, or "bridge-building," projects they have already undertaken in the past several years between the United States and Turkey. With the incorporation of an inter-religious and American advisory board, the Atlantic Institute has also begun to move beyond just dialogue to start incorporating shared service/*hizmet* activities with people of other faiths, perhaps showing signs of moving beyond interfaith dialogue projects to interfaith "conduct" projects in the future. My discussions with non-Muslim, non-Turkish people in Atlanta who affiliate with the *hizmet* movement also leave the impression that *hizmet* may be beginning to transition from a faith-based (Muslim) movement to a faith-inspired (interfaith) movement eventually based in shared community service. While I have to end this study just as I feel the movement is on the cusp of heading in new directions, further research should continue to examine the movement's fluctuating identities for establishing moral authority in contexts of localization and, in Mandaville's words, its ongoing process of "cultural becoming" in the modern world.

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