



Person, Places, and Development

2.1 BIOGRAPHIES OF FETHULLAH GÜLEN

In a footnote, Hakan Yavuz (2013) identified Latif Erdoğan (1995), writing in Turkish, and also Ali Ünal and Alphonse Williams (2000), writing in English, as the main sources for Gülen's biography, noting that both Erdoğan and Ünal are "very close to Gülen" (p. 252) although Erdoğan (who is not related to Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan) has since broken with Gülen. There is, however, also the somewhat unusual book by Farid al-Ansari (2015), originally published in 2011 in Arabic and now available in English. Like the biography by Erdoğan and the Alphonse and Williams book, al-Ansari's book is published by the movement press. In fact, Blue Dome has promoted al-Ansari's book with a cover sticker that states it is a "novel," while in its Preface, the author al-Ansari says that the text he has produced "might be considered a novel, a biography, a poem or a history book" but that he himself was "not exactly sure what it should be considered." What, however, he does say that he knows is that the book is "a story of a spirit in anguish" connected with "the heart of a man from Anatolia whose radiance has abundantly flowed upon the whole world!" (np).

Since Yavuz's summary of these biographical sources, and in contrast with al-Ansari's more subjectively reflective meditation, Jon Pahl (2019), an American historian of religion, has more recently written a full-length biography in English, which has also been published by the movement's Blue Dome Press. Overall, in relation to Gülen's biography, Gülen's close

associate and interviewee Ahmet Kurucan (see Acknowledgements) says: “One could classify his lifetime into several stages starting from Erzurum first; then Edirne second; then he moved to Izmir; then he came to Istanbul – and I split Istanbul into two: before 1992 and after 1992 until 1999 when he moved to the US is the final stage in the United States.”

2.2 ERZURUM: TRADITIONAL CONTEXTUALISATION

Muhammed Fethullah Gülen was born in the small village of Korucuk, in the Erzurum region of eastern Turkey on 27 April 1941. An editorial note in al-Ansari (2015) states of his given name Fethullah that it has “roots in the Arabic words *fath* and *Allah*, meaning ‘Conquest of Allah’ or ‘Opening the Door to Divine Mercy and Benevolence’.” (p. 1). In Korucuk, the contextualisation of the growth and development of his thinking and acting was primarily one of a deeply nurturing environment rooted in the traditions of Anatolian Islam. Gülen’s father Ramiz was an *imam* and, by the age of ten, the young Fethullah had read the Qur’an. As Gülen’s close associate and interviewee, Hamdullah Öztürk (see Acknowledgements) explained:

One should take account of the importance of the home Gülen was raised. Especially his grandmother had a great influence on him. She was a woman of great love for God and the Prophet. She was immersed to the point of intoxication for the love of God and the divine. So, his subconscious developed with that love from early years of his childhood. When his grandmother heard the name of God twice, she would pass out. He grew up with that huge love for the divine. His father was an *imam* in this *tekke*, a Sufi lodge of Alvarli Efe who was like a spiritual prototype for Gülen. So, when his thoughts and spiritual world were being shaped, his first role models and prototypes were the Prophet, his Companions and other saintly leaders. These prototypes were the ones who were able to produce a civilization out of sand, out of the desert. Also, his family genealogy has this connection to the two great *pashas*, two uncles of his mother, one was a great *pasha* in Edirne, in the most western part of Turkey next to Greece. He was a general. And the other was also a general, in Medina. They both defended those cities in the First World War. So, there is this noble historical backdrop to his identity as well.

When interviewed, Gülen explained about the effect of upon him within this period of one other key Islamically prototypical person, as follows:

In my childhood I have seen one such person, who is the *imam*, Mohammed, of the town, or the village, of Alvar, although I was not in an age or development to be his student, he always treated me as if I were his student. And love of God, and love of the Prophet, and love of the whole creation could be seen in his person, in his life. He often cried upon recitation of certain verses or prophetic sayings. And if somebody said something inappropriate about the Prophet or about God almost his heart stopped, he was so sensitive.

Even more personally, he then went on to explain the influence of some key members of his own family, and especially that of his grandfather, Ahmet Efendi, as well as of his own parents, Ramiz and Razia:

Among my family, extended family members, my mother's father Ahmet Efendi was a person who, nobody recalls any incident in which he harmed or disturbed anybody. He was very sensitive, very caring person. And according to my family members he was reciting the whole Qur'an every three days. So he was compassion personified. For a long while I've never noticed him actually getting angry. My father's father was a very serious person, so much that when he was walking by a gathering, people would, if they were sitting, they would stand up, they respected him so much. He was a very serious person, but he also was very caring and did not hurt or harm anybody. My father and mother also exemplified this spirit. I cannot claim that I have actually inherited their sensitivity or devotion.

Öztürk recounts that, "It was in the second or third grade that Fethullah Gülen stopped going to public school." While some have pointed to such a short period of formal education as a basis for attacking Gülen, Öztürk's evaluation of this is that "This is how, I believe, he was protected from the dictates of the education system of the Turkish Republic. There was no religion at all, basically. They were basically shaping, forming the generation to a certain goal: that ideology had that vision." Öztürk says that Gülen then went on to study in a *madrassa*, of which Öztürk said "Many of the literature that were being taught there were irrelevant to our times, they were written centuries back, but they kept on studying the same literature, over and over."

By the age of 14, Gülen had preached his first sermons. After graduating from a private divinity school in Erzurum, he was licensed under Turkey's Diyanet system to act as an *imam*, including to preach and to teach. However, as Öztürk explains “What he experienced in Erzurum was extremism, extreme conservatism, which really was very tough to break through, that constituted a set of its own problems.” Kurucan says of Gülen at this time that:

So, in Erzurum what you would really see is a very deeply pious Hojaefendi, with really orthodox understanding which is no different from the rest of the community of scholars all the time that he was in that Erzurum province. So, he was very conservative in those years. In my terminology, we cannot say if someone is really like reactionary. He is living in the past, he is not in the 20th century. Very orthodox.

Öztürk notes, though, that it was also during this period that Gülen heard of Bedüzzaman Said Nursi (1873–1960), who had been a renewing influence in Islam in relation to modernity (Mardin 1989; Turner and Hurkuç 2008) so that, “When a student of Nursi with the name Muzaffer came to the town, Gülen and his *madrassah* friends, were invited by Mehmet Kırkıncı to attend his reading circle.” However, Öztürk went on to note that when the time came for the second circle meeting, only Gülen turned up and that this was because “They did not agree with the way in which the *Hadith* and traditions were being interpreted in Nursi's works. They could not reconcile what they learned at *madrassah* with how Nursi interprets this knowledge; only Gülen was able to make that transition.” Therefore, he also stayed overnight with the students, watching them in their night prayers and, from his observation of this he concluded that it was possible, also today, to live like the original Companions of the Prophet Muhammad. As Öztürk summarised it:

That's the first time he can see people really acting out the stories that he heard from his father, from that *imam*, from his grandmother: that these people are really leaving the world behind, as the Prophet did going out to exile to another city, and keeping himself separated, free, from those worldly aspirations. So, this is really a possible thing.

This was, in many ways the biographical origin of the expansion of Gülen's vision, from Erzerum to the world, with Öztürk recalling of him that:

This is the first time that encounter took place of a man who grew up with the stories of that noble history, stories of people who really created that huge, honourable civilization out of the desert sand, and with the people who can really achieve the same thing, perhaps, in the modern times. I even heard him say once that he was always dreaming of such a world even from his early childhood. That connection of the human being with the life, and that connection of the life with the universe, that triangle: human being, life and the universe, he saw with the teachings of Nursi that could be done not only by religious studies, but also through the study of the universe, through natural science.

2.3 EDIRNE: SECULAR AND PLURAL CONTEXTUALISATION

From 1963 to 1966, Gülen moved to live in Edirne and Kırklareli, near the Bulgarian border. Edirne, formerly known as Adrianople, was between 1369 and 1453 the capital city of the Ottoman Empire. In terms of Turkey's geographical, intellectual, and spiritual landscape, this represented a radically different environment: geographically in the European, rather than in the Asian part of Turkey; intellectually in organic contact with Western ideas; and in overall atmosphere, more secular.

This environment fed into a different kind of contextualisation of Gülen's thought and action. This was in the sense that, in contrast with the perhaps more 'taken for granted' inheritance and environment represented by Korucuk and Erzurum, Edirne represented an environment of challenge to a 'received Islam' in which very little could be taken for granted. As characterised by Öztürk, "Hojaefendi with his piety, that godliness, praying all the time, was praised, and people really praised the way he lived in Erzurum." But then "After Erzurum, from the far east of Turkey he goes to the far west of the country to Edirne, which is the opposite to all he grew up with." It is generally seen as an area where not many people practice religion and where there can also be anti-religious currents. It was also in Edirne that Gülen "comes face to face with the police – he has become *persona non grata*, with the way he came from Erzurum, as a pious man. They actually kept a policeman at his doorstep to cut his access to the rest of the community." Thus, in this environment,

in many ways, began the history of tension between Gülen's life, teaching, and work and those elements of the Turkish state that were, at very least, suspicious of him.

It was in this context that, as Öztürk further explains, Gülen "was able to see whether his studies from the past could really respond to the world he was now facing in Edirne." Having experienced the conservatism of Erzurum, "In Edirne in the west, he saw another domain of problems which actually was arising from antagonism towards religion, an animosity towards faith and practice." The challenge and opportunity of contextualisation between these different geographical and ideological locations arguably lies at the personal and experiential roots of Gülen's development of a life, teaching, and inspiration geared towards charting what Ahmet Kuru (2003) has called Gülen's search for a "middle way" in the relationship between Islam and modernity.

Edirne was also the place where Gülen had his first direct and significant experience of encounter with religious plurality in terms of meeting with individuals and communities from other than Muslim religious traditions. Edirne is, for example, an important place for Bahá'ís, being where the founder of the Bahá'í faith, Bahá'ulláh (whose house in Edirne can still be visited today), lived in exile between 1863 and 1868 before being further banished to the Ottoman penal colony in Akka (now in the modern state of Israel). The Bahá'í tradition can—for many contemporary Sunni Muslims, as for the historical Ottoman Empire—be at the least controversial because of its claims to bring further revelation beyond that conveyed through Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad, but Öztürk recalled that, while there, "Gülen visited their places of worship and he met them." Öztürk also noted that "He met the Jewish leaders, he went to their synagogues to observe the way they prayed." Edirne is the site of Kal Kadoş Agadol (or Great Synagogue) which was originally opened for worship on the eve of Pesach in April, 1909, replacing 13 previous synagogues that had been destroyed in the city's great fire of 1905. At its peak in the early twentieth century, the Jewish community in Edirne had around 20,000 members until it shrank and the synagogue fell into disrepair and was closed in 1983, before eventually being restored and re-opened in 2015 as both a cultural museum and a dedicated place of worship.¹

Such encounters informed what Gülen's close associates evaluate as having been a significant period of reflection. As Gülen's close associate and interviewee Şerif Ali Tekalan (see Acknowledgements) put it "While staying in Edirne, he stayed in the window of the mosque where he was

doing his duty and thought about what he should do.” What came out of this reflection was a new approach to preaching. Indeed, it is arguable that in order really to understand Gülen, one needs to understand him as a preacher who is communicatively—and hence dialogically—engaged with the congregations and other groups to which he preaches. In relation to this kind of preaching, Tekalan explained that:

These sermons were completely different from those of others in terms of the subjects, presentations and methods of the sermons. Sermons not only in Edirne but also in other cities were performed in the same way. It was like a college course for students and followers. The existence of God, prophethood, the afterlife and similar subjects, examples, questions and answers were both historical and true. For those who had little knowledge of religion these sermons were satisfactory. It showed that religion was not only historical and philosophical for both ordinary and intellectual people, but also it is something that can be practiced in everyday lives and that it is feasible.

But Tekalan also notes that, rather more distinctively among Turkish *imams*, Gülen’s preaching was not limited to the physical and spiritual environment of mosque buildings, but took place “also in coffee houses, movie theatres and houses. He was trying to tell people these truths, no matter when or where.” In addition, the content of what Gülen was preaching and discussing was very different to what might today be called an ‘Islamist’ vision of engagement with, and transformation of, society through the adoption of *Shariah* of the kind that some were also at that time promoting both on the streets and in some intellectual circles. As CAI put it when reflecting on his neighbourhood during his youth, “In our area there was this people, this very orthodox people, who voted for this Erbakan group” who was known as “the father of political ‘Islamism’” and of whom, as CAI describes it, “they were chanting in the streets, shouting out from their cars in the streets, with their flags, and I said is this what Islam is? I hate this.”

This period also saw Gülen’s first experience of imprisonment. This came about because, after two years in Edirne, it was time for him to undertake his obligatory military service, for which he was sent to İskenderun. While there, because of a sermon that he preached he found himself facing charges. Although ultimately acquitted (in what was the first instance of a pattern to be repeated throughout his life), he was held

for ten days in a military prison as a disciplinary punishment. After his military service, Gülen then stayed with his family in Erzurum for a year.

2.4 IZMIR: CREATIVE CONTEXTUALISATION THROUGH DIFFERENTIATION

In 1966, Gülen was appointed to Izmir's Bornova mosque. Izmir is Turkey's third largest city and, as Tekalan put it, the city "was different in terms of culture and behaviour," it being "a more secular city." In relation to this move to Izmir, Öztürk explains of Gülen that "he actually didn't want to go. He was appointed there upon someone's reference." But in terms of a religious interpretation of why this happened, Öztürk also says that, "But I believe this was a response to his inner call from his early years, that longing for that generation which yielded a civilization out of sand in a glorious history. I believe this is related to his strong connection to God."

In Izmir, Gülen was confronted with two contextual polarisations of that period in Turkey. The first, as explained by Öztürk, was that of religion and science since "he met with the academy, with the students from universities, and also with the hippy generation of 1968, you know. There was this huge conflict in the universities where people were polarised across religion and science conflict. That was one thing." The other polarisation was that of politics and ideology and so, as summarised by Öztürk:

His idealist aspirations meet the real hurricane in Izmir. He is truly introduced to western philosophy and literature in Izmir. So, in 1971, when there was this military intervention he actually shares the same cell with the extreme leftists in the prison. So, they shared the same space and he came to know them much better of course.

In terms of connecting with people and of the principle of contextualisation that informed his overall approach, "He was following the same direction here, just like he did with Erdirne. He was trying to find a way to get to people." In the course of this, although following and further developing the same basic method of dialogical engagement, this was now in the context of a cosmopolitan coastal city which was also a crucible of commercial, social, cultural, and political energy. And it was here that what the heading to this section of the chapter calls a "creative contextualisation"—including through differentiation from other movements rooted in Islam—took place, and which stimulated the further

development of Gülen's thought, teaching, and action into the possibility of a still wider work and vision. As Öztürk evaluated this period:

I believe that this is a huge opportunity for Hojaefendi to be here after Edirne and Izmir, to have lived here for this many years: to see that level, the height that human intellect has come, and how we can, or any person who has been nourished by the Qur'an and Prophet's example, contribute to this civilization.

Within that overall context, a number of individuals began collectively to coalesce around Gülen's teaching and proposals for practice. By then he was becoming known among those inspired by him by the honorific title of *hocaefendi* (see Sect. 1.2). As this occurred, both Gülen and those inspired by his teaching began to differentiate themselves more clearly from the *cemaat* (or, community) of those inspired by Nursi, and Hizmet started to develop its own distinctive forms of self-organising. This included, firstly, the opening of the so-called *ışık evleri* (lighthouses), and secondly, the adoption of communication methods with the wider society via use of what, at that time, was the technologically cutting-edge medium of audio cassette recordings of Gülen's sermons. These were, significantly, free from the control and constraints of the state media but they were also ideally suited to the transmission of core messages within the process of the creation of a dynamic and rapidly emerging socio-religious movement. Indeed, it was in such a context that many of the 'weeping sermons' for which Gülen later became so well-known were spread (Sunier and Şahin 2015).

Gülen and Hizmet were seeking to find their own point of balance in relation to the political parties and groups of the time. During this period, the MSP (the Millî Selâmet Partisi, or in English "National Salvation Party") began to gain in strength and prominence. While Necmettin Erbakan recommended his followers to relate to Gülen and help him, in 1977, Gülen criticised the boycott of the Turkish Islam Institutes and criticised the New Asia group for being too political. A sign of Hizmet's growing distinctiveness was the foundation, in 1978, of the journal *Sızıntı* (or *Fountain*) published by the Türkiye Öğretmenlar Vafı (or, in English, Turkish Teacher Foundation).

Open debate with the MSP followed after Gülen, in a 24 June 1980 sermon criticised the MSP and the National Paper (*Milli Gazete*), albeit without specifically naming them, even though during this period the

leadership of the MSP had not openly criticised Gülen. During this latter period in Izmir, Gülen frequently obtained medical reports excusing him from duty, until in November 1980 he was appointed to Çanakkale. However, he again obtained a medical report as a result of which he did not commence his assignment there and, on 20 March 1981, he resigned from his office as a recognised preacher.

In Izmir, as a student, Tekalan lived together with a small group of other students in one of Hizmet's houses before such forms of living became known as *ışık evleri*. As Tekalan explains it: "There was no such name at that time" but we were "all college students" and "were staying together. We prepared our meals ourselves, prayed together and studied together." And Tekalan recalls that, "At that time, Gülen was coming to Bornova to sermons, and we were visiting him, and he was coming to our house time to time. We had many questions about religion, and he was answering our questions. We had a great discussion with him." Following the initial establishment of these houses, Gülen's close associate and interviewee, Mustafa Özcan (see Acknowledgements) says that:

Starting with seventy-one and towards the end of the decade, at that time there were sixty-seven city provinces in Turkey and forty-five out of sixty-seven cities that in a sense were in competition to establish such student hostels because they saw that it's working and that their own kids are benefiting in their cities, in the sense that there is this student hostel establishment and progress.

2.5 ISTANBUL: WITHDRAWAL AND COSMOPOLITAN ENGAGEMENT

By 1980, Gülen had relocated to Istanbul, the cosmopolitan city of Turkey straddling Europe and Asia and the influences flowing between them. Initially, in the context of the impact flowing from the 1980 military coup he was, of necessity, withdrawn from public life for around six years. For much of the time in Istanbul he lived, as Jon Pahl's, 2019 biography of him put it "hiding in plain sight" (p. 190) in a small flat on the fifth floor of a Hizmet dormitory, though from time to time he needed to leave and find refuge in other parts of Turkey, including in a house in Erzurum that his brother had secretly built. But as Pahl's biography of Gülen put it, Gülen's fifth floor flat in Istanbul soon became a metaphor for how, what the novelist Orhan Pamuk, Pahl (2019), called 'the melancholy of Istanbul'

in due course “turned into both a deep personal peace and an expanding network of people” (p. 189).

Alongside his own personal devotions, study and reading, for those who knew where to find him, Gülen offered a breadth and depth of teaching that both laid the foundations of much of the next phase of his teaching and work as well as extending them. Pahl explained the significance of what occurred in this period and in this place in the following way: “It is an axiom of contemporary cultural studies that place matters. So it should be no surprise that over time the 5th Floor became to people of Hizmet much more than just an apartment” (p. 205). As an example of the significance attributed to this, as al-Ansari (2015) put it in his ‘biographical novel,’ it was here that Gülen found:

...retreat and revelation, his exile and prison, his companions and gatherings. Month after month he would stay there in this sacred space and not leave it except to go to one of his other small rooms if he received a sign, an indication or a warning that it was necessary for him to leave or to go to another place.

After Turgut Özal arranged for the military charges against Gülen to be dropped, from 1986 onwards, Gülen emerged ever more into a public life and profile in Istanbul. As Tekalan put it in a somewhat succinct and compressed way, generally passing over the years of withdrawal, “When he went to Istanbul, he contacted businessmen, academics, Christian leaders, the Jewish people and many other celebrities.”

And indeed, it was during the second part of his period in Istanbul, during the 1990s, that Gülen started particularly to become known for his teaching about, commitment to, and engagement in inter-faith dialogue in both Turkey itself and beyond. Fast-breaking events during Ramadan were one of the key ways in which, on the one hand, Gülen’s commitment to build bridges and extend friendship to Jewish and Christian leaders and communities were concretely expressed, but because of their religious and social significance, these *iftars* also acted as public interventions of a kind that provoked reflection in Hizmet and among the wider Muslim population of Istanbul and Turkey.

In January 1998, Gülen publicly broke the fast with the Jewish businesspeople Üzeyir Garih and İshak Alaton, partners in the Turkish business conglomerate Alarko Holdings. Soon after that, Gülen had what Pahl (2019) describes as “a very public meeting” (p. 238) with then chief

Sephardic Rabbi of Israel, Eliyahu Bakshi-Doron, following which “Gülen continued throughout his time in Istanbul to foster good relations with the Jewish community around the globe and in Istanbul” (p. 239), including several meetings with the then Chief Rabbi of Turkey, David Aseo.

Gülen’s public meetings with important Turkish Christian leaders evolved out of broadly inclusive Fast-breaking events organised by the Journalists and Writers’ Foundation which was, by then, very active in activities concerned with dialogue and which, in February 1995, organised an inter-religious *iftar* for over a thousand people of all Christian, Jewish, and Muslim backgrounds, including religious people and secularists. In April 1996, at the invitation of Patriarch Bartholomew I, the Pharnariot Greek Patriarch of Istanbul, Gülen met the Patriarch for a brief dialogue at the Polat Renaissance Hotel on the Sea of Marmara. In November 1997, Gülen also met with the Vatican Representative to Istanbul, George Marovitch, who was one of those who had attended the Ramadan dinners. This, in turn, opened up the way, in January 1998, for Gülen to receive a message from Pope John Paul II in honour of the month of Ramadan, which was followed a month later by Gülen’s travel to Rome to meet the Pope which Pahl describes as “the apex of his *public* activities on behalf of interreligious dialogue” (p. 249). Other highly significant and sensitive meetings with Christian leaders (given the historical context and continuing trauma affecting relations between Turks and Armenians) included meetings with Armenian Patriarchs Karekin II and Mesrob II.

These personal and individual initiatives by Gülen in inter-religious dialogue and inter-community relations, as supported also and built on by the Journalists’ and Writers’ Foundation, all had widespread effects that went beyond even the importance of the individuals who were directly involved given the broader impacts that arose from their profound active symbolism in the particular socio-religious context of Turkey. But in terms of Hizmet’s development more broadly, its educational initiatives in many ways remained the driving motor of Hizmet’s expansion throughout Turkey and, in due course, into Europe, Turkish Eurasia, and beyond.

2.6 PIVOTAL ROLE OF EDUCATIONAL INITIATIVES

After the abolition of traditional *madrassahs*, Imam Hatip schools were founded in Turkey for the training of government employed *imams*. In relation to the emergence of Hizmet educational initiatives, Öztürk adds of Gülen that, “While in Izmir, he was *imam* but also the teacher of Qur’an in a Qur’anic school. So, surely he was also supporting the

expansion of the numbers of the İmam Hatip schools so that more people can read and understand the Qur'an." Nevertheless, it was also the case that because: "In Izmir he has also encountered with the challenges of modernity" and as a result "He understands that İmam Hatip schools really do not lead you to anywhere where students can find responses to this conflict. Then he thinks a better way would be the kind of schools where people could see that religion and science can go together, that Muslims can also do science; that science is not against religion." Gülen arrived at the view that "İmam Hatip schools would never be able to achieve that," and this led into what Tekalan described as Gülen's "second period". Tekalan identified this as being from 1980 onwards, during which Gülen was starting to place a special emphasis on education, advocating for the establishment of primary schools and high schools. And in this context:

Not only the well off people but even the ordinary lay people, when they see that there are safe havens in a sense for their children to go to the big cities and to attend high schools or the universities, they are encouraged to send their kids to these educational institutions based on the trust that people will take care of them so they will not be prey to terror, atheism, you know, other pervert ideologies in a sense, or addictions and sort of other, you know, misconduct. Believing that they see the students over there, so they will be more encouraged to send these kids to such 'houses' and to such people.

Educational initiatives were therefore the first among the triad of characteristics by which Hizmet in due course became to be more known (Weller 2022, Sects. 2.2, 2.3 and 2.4) within the broad heritage of Nursi that identified ignorance, conflict, and poverty as the three evils facing both Islam and humanity and sought to address them through initiatives in education, dialogue, and the relief of poverty. As Öztürk explained about Gülen:

Even at this time, he travelled all cities, whether in smaller cities or in larger groups he convinced people that we have three enemies – you know it: poverty, ignorance and disunity and he then convinced them with education and you know, being economically developed, and combine efforts, small business people combine efforts in collectives to make investments and to make such efforts against disunity, interaction and mutual respect, you

know, in a sense, among that dialogue, interaction, proper interaction, rather than being reactionary.

Those businessmen and students who had, for up to a decade, been learning with and from Gülen, responded to his challenge to support the creation of what he hoped would become what he called a “Golden Generation” (Sunier 2014) of confident and educated young Muslims, through supporting the establishment of schools, beginning with Yamanlar High School in Izmir. Then, according to Tekalan, there was a development of mutually reinforcing initiatives of the kind that characterised the growth and spread of Hizmet in Turkey through nearly four decades until July 2016. Young teachers graduating in a range of subjects were ready to work in Yamanlar High School, and within four or five years, Tekalan said that “this school achieved great results, won prizes in the international science olympics, mathematics, computer science and physics. They always won first prizes in Turkey.” As a consequence of this, businessmen and other people in other cities “realized how important it is to have these schools in other cities too, and they’ve tried to find out how they could open these schools in their own provinces.” Therefore, Tekalan says, “They also opened schools, but they needed experienced teachers. Just like at Yamanlar High School in Izmir.” As a result of this:

Teachers were sent to these schools from Izmir and other cities of Turkey. The success of these schools was also very good. People across Turkey loved these schools. Why, because these schools not only train students at universities, but also care about educating people with good charitable objects. On the one hand, they taught courses such as physics chemistry very well, but on the other hand they also taught how to live the practices of religion with examples in life.

In relation to those unstable times, close associate of Gülen, Mustafa Özcan explained that the schools started also to include female students in what was a relatively radical development given the inherited context of the time within which:

At that time, among the Muslims, they were concerned and for that reason they prevent their own daughters to go to schools or to attend high schools after the compulsory primary school education, they were not sending their daughters to the secondary schools and high schools, let alone universities. And if the family is a little bit well off, affluent, or a little bit knowledgeable

about the social issues and the religion, even they were just defending this as a cause to protect so-called morality, chastity or, you know 'our own values'. Then Hojaefendi came revolutionary in that sense. He convinced all these well-off people, the people leading the communities, and afterwards the normal ordinary people, laymen, to send their daughters to the school to provide them with a proper education and let them study at higher schools for their education.

With regard to the centrality of education in the teaching and practice of Gülen, Özcan explained that, "If you just look at the 1960s and the '70s at that time it was always the same story, coup d'états, coalitions, failing coalitions, street fights and skirmishes, and interference of the state apparatus in all government issues and the people, but no matter what happened, Hojaefendi didn't give up his idea of education." Although in that early period the Turkish system did not allow the establishment of private schools, Özcan explained of Gülen that:

He came up with the idea to establish 'houses' in which four or five students would share the same flat and the basic necessities will be sponsored or provided by the businessmen as donations, and by charities, so that they can, in a safe environment, properly study their courses. It doesn't mean only Islamic study. It can mean that when they are attending their schools they can also properly study the secular subjects over there.

And, as Öztürk further explained:

At that time, these institutions also set a good example to the other faith communities so even they saw that this is picking up and working, even if just a few communities, religious communities, also follow in the footsteps. But then majority of the people saw that whether they are coming from the rightist background or leftist background, that the street skirmishes and fights are coming from an ideological place and that they cannot trust other people, people from all backgrounds started sending their kids to our hostels and such institutions thinking that they will be honest, they will be just hard working, and they will be at the end be beneficial to their own people and community, the Turkish community in general. So, up to the 1980s, up to the September 12 1980 coup d'état, this system of houses, and of student hostels, and the dormitories became a true model for Turkish people for all groups and communities, and rather than a path for a proper education, it became almost a highway. It developed so much and it was embraced by all people. So, this 1980 coup did not discriminate whether rightist or leftist,

whether they are equally culpable, criminal or not. They bulldozed all the groups of the people from the left and the right without any distinction. At that time the basic understanding was that it was only the rich and well-developed people's children were attending the schools and high schools, and the universities were completely exceptional and in the universities only the rich people and influential people's children were attending.

As time went on, however, the military government started to encourage people to establish and develop their own educational institutions. And in this broader setting, the schools were not only attractive to pious and practising Muslim parents and but also secular people were supporting the project by giving their children to Hizmet schools as well. Tekalan set these developments within an interpretive framework that emphasised their religious inspiration although, of course, this development can also be analysed from a socio-economic perspective. Thus, as Tekalan pithily summarised it: "It's like a franchise," while interviewee Ozcan Keleş (see Acknowledgements) from the UK has suggested that "there's also an operational reason for why there was this impetus for creating schools" and that is that:

The schools were founded by and large by capital investment. Capital investment is solicited from donors. Donors in part express their commitment through donation. So, how do you continue the expression of commitment if you don't continue to open and found new establishments, i.e. buildings?

In other words, in order to operate as educational institutions, school buildings also need equipment, furniture, and book supplies. Therefore, as Keleş explained it, although "ultimately nobody is trying to do nothing for their personal gain. It's not a negative thing, and it's not about becoming rich oneself" and, as close associate of Gülen Reşit Haylamaz (see Acknowledgements) explained the evolution of this system through projects that in due course became institutionalised such as the Kaynak Publishing Group:

It first started by producing testing materials for the testing/ tutoring schools, weekend schools; there were hundreds, perhaps thousands of them in Turkey, and they definitely needed some testing materials to make it different from the rest of the industry. So what happened is that some of those teachers came together to form a company, a publisher's company, to meet those needs. And as schools started to be opened in different countries, new

needs emerged and our publishing house also tried to meet their needs as much as they could. Other companies like school furniture which came out of the need to furnish our schools with furniture as well as laboratories, which were a huge investment. And our friends, as I understand it, set up this company to supply those needs in the most cost-effective way.

Reflecting on this, Keleş described it is “a pattern” that is related to the Turkish term *metafizik gerilim* (literally translatable as ‘metaphysical tension’) in which one “encourages people to become overwhelmed by altruism, in order to get them to donate for the founding of a school, what next?”

The pivotally important role of schools like Fatih High School in Istanbul and the Samanyolu High School in Ankara in realising Gülen’s aim to encourage the creation of a so-called “Golden Generation” can be seen in the testimonies of many people who later became deeply involved in Hizmet. For example, when asked how he became involved with Hizmet, CA1, explained that:

The private schools were a new phenomenon in Turkey and Hizmet schools were some of the few ones that were available other than the other very secular schools, which were also very expensive. In our neighbourhood I had my best friend ... who was one year older than me and I heard he was accepted by this Fatih College, which was not very far away from where my home was.

He explained that “My family was a very secular family. My father was not a practising person. But he was an honest man, a very virtuous man in many other ways.” Of both his family and himself, he said that “we had no idea about the school.” In the first instance, he wanted go there for the very ordinary and common reason among children, namely, that his best friend was already a student there. It was only “later on I discovered that there were rumours about the school, because of my wider secular family and there was this pressure from my uncles on my mother not to keep sending me to that school.” But despite these rumours, “I really liked the school” and that “They were pushing us to study harder. I really loved the way they taught. I loved the way they taught English a lot. And they were doing it well.” Overall, his evaluation was that, “I really enjoyed the environment and I did not see any manifestation of any radicalism or extremism with these people – on the contrary, I saw teachers who were

passionately teaching, smiling and young.” But as he said, although studying there for seven years, in relation to Gülen:

I heard about him, I think first, when I was in my third or fourth year and there I heard about this preacher who was coming to Istanbul to deliver a sermon and people were speaking about this, and some of my friends invited me to go too, but my parents did not allow me, so I didn’t go, which is something I really feel missing in my heart. I never attended any of his sermons in a mosque. But I listened to his audio cassettes.

Significantly, this interviewee says, “But more importantly I met with the teachers” of whom he said that he noticed “how they were so kind to parents, how they were so generous in their smile. You could feel the warmth of these people emanating out of their soul. It was nothing artificial. That connection just developed over time.” In summary, and in contrast, he said of these teachers that:

They were not like other people who would fill our mosques who are usually older men, and who did so mostly because it became a part of their lives. But I saw in these beautiful people, a much greater devotion and a much great connection when they stood for prayer and I really loved praying with them. They recited the Qur’an beautifully which, in a way, that didn’t sound to me that beautiful before.

However, he was not a boarding student until his last year and therefore “I never knew Gülen was behind all those things, Hojaefendi,” although, “I later learned that he actually stayed for some time at the top floor of the school which was like a guest room, and Gülen was there, but I never saw him.” And this was but one testimony among many. For example, the asylum-seeker in Switzerland, AS2 (see Acknowledgements), explained that because education had been very important for his parents, back in Turkey he had been sent a school around 200 kilometers distant from his home and which, as he described it, was, “a privileged school, a private school. And it was connected with Hizmet.”

As with the previous interviewee, this was despite the fact that his father was not a Hizmet member, but it happened because Hizmet’s early initiatives in education were often highly valued across at least parts of the broader society beyond those who were themselves directly involved with Hizmet. According to this asylum-seeker, his father’s view of Hizmet was that “He knows it very well and he loved the guys of the members – they

are the right men and good men.” Looking back, AS2 said, “So I went there, to that school, connected with Hizmet, and it began like that.” In other words, the seeds of what later became networked relationships were planted at that time because “they had a lot of activities as well, so how can I say, this affected me. So, I wanted to continue the relations.”

At the same time, while clearly engagement with the community of Hizmet people was strongly socialising in its effects, this was not only a case of an individual being simply attracted to something because of it meeting an otherwise unmet psychological or emotional need. Rather, the same interviewee underlined about that experience of being drawn into the community that, “When I see something nonsensical and illogical I can quit, I can finish the relation and connection.” But evaluating his experience in the round, he said “I had known a lot people and I recognised a lot of Hizmet people in that school and later on I connected all my life with them. So it started like that.”

Another anonymous Hizmet-related asylum-seeker, AS1 (see Acknowledgements), from Turkey and at present living in Switzerland—recounted of his youth in Turkey that, “I met the Hizmet volunteers first when I was attending the middle school. At that time, I was looking for after school help to prepare myself for the university. At that time, I was attending some activities of the Hizmet followers.” From the testimony of this interviewee, it is also clear that Hizmet created networks for those who then went on to universities and he explained that he had become particularly active in Hizmet “during the first years of my university life.”

A similar theme is common among other informants and from across different age groups. Thus, interviewee Erkan Toğuşlu (see Acknowledgements) from Belgium, recalled that, “My overall relationship with Hizmet began already in my early childhood, when I saw especially that many people were dedicated to education, in Turkey, for example, in my little town on the eastern side.” So, as with many others, contact in the Hizmet schools became the gateway to becoming aware of and to engage with Gülen’s teaching as well as getting to know other parts of Hizmet. As Toğuşlu went on to explain further:

Then later on I discovered many other people who committed themselves also in other areas like, social welfare activities, school education, coming from different backgrounds – from businesspeople to university students, also in terms of age very old people and very young people and they committed themselves to different areas within the movement.

Finally, this led into personal engagement with aspects of the movement, so that “I think that, slowly, I started organising some activities within the Hizmet movement – especially tutoring the young children in Turkey, including giving them some extra educational courses.” Asylum-seeker interviewee AS3 (see Acknowledgements) explained that he had previously been to “the Hizmet preparation courses for high school.” However, AS3 and his wife, AS4 (see Acknowledgements), only first properly connected with Hizmet when they were university students. This was through the movement’s dormitories, of which the husband, AS3, said “I was for one year in a dormitory of the Hizmet movement so I learned many things there.” Later on, AS3 also said that, as a couple “Maybe once or twice in a month we met somewhere and talked with each other, or had some social things organised like a picnic or a football match, or like that. Our general social life was around those people. Because of that we were so much talking with them or talking on the telephone.” In the light of this, it would seem that the initial attraction of Hizmet included the kind of activities that it sponsored and the warm and honest character of individuals committed to Hizmet as much as the actual teaching of Gülen. Indeed, the couple both affirmed what was explained by AS3 in the following way:

First, what we liked was people making activities. We are eating, we are having maybe more social things. First of all that: if you like them, if you like to go there. But after liking those people, people try to tell about something more – maybe, if you want to read this book, advising. So first getting to like those people and then learning something about the movement.

As AS1 explained it, after being in a Hizmet school, “When I went to the University I also connected with them and I lived in their dormitory” or lighthouse, in relation to which he explained further that “It was very enjoyable for me. It was very good because there were a lot of kind people. We were reading always books, novels and magazines there. It was a good chance for me to improve myself in both spiritually and intellectually. So, it was an opportunity for me to live there.”

As Hizmet schools spread into different parts of the world, including the continent of Europe (Weller 2022), according to interviewee Mustafa Gezen from Denmark (see Acknowledgements), the Hayskolen Hizmet school founded there in 1993 was “my way into the Hizmet movement. I became familiar with people from the school.” He also commented that,

“I think you will have heard similar stories about teachers who were great role models through their teaching and actions who gave me as a Danish Kurdish student with roots from Turkey motivation to educate myself.” Gezen came from a family that had not had the opportunity of an extended education and, of the teachers that he encountered, he said that they were:

Great role models and educated; they were people with good manners – you can call it *‘akblaq* in Arabic, something was different. We began to see that this was an amazing way of being a human. So that inspired me a lot and I saw some role models and I am still in touch with a couple of them still.

Gezen further explained that “my contact with Hizmet grew in the high school, and then we were going to camps together, playing football in the camps, although in Gezen’s case – rather exceptionally among Hizmet people – he eventually qualified at the University of Copenhagen with a Master’s degree in the History of Religions and, on which he commented that he ‘had not met many people doing this at the point that I did it.’” Looking back on the original creative impulses behind what eventually became a global development, Öztürk noted that:

Hojaefendi pinpointed one fact about the social movements or collective action then, that people are always a bit hesitant and reserved when they are making progress on jumping from one step to another. So even when people, Hojaefendi came forward with a private school, or secondary or high school initiative, even the believers were a bit hesitant that we cannot do the state job, you know, how can we manage such things, even Hojaefendi admitted that at that time he was having difficulties in convincing people to take up this initiative of establishing private schools. But again, one of the favourable points, at that time since the state encouraged this one, so it was not only Hojaefendi’s, in a sense, pipe dream, it was what was needed and required and the state allows this. So in this way people gradually and slowly picked up the initiative of establishing schools.

As Haylamaz reflected, “Many foundations, especially related to education, were opened in almost all provinces of Turkey. These foundations later gave way to schools.” As Gülen’s influence spread, Haylamaz noted that, “His audio cassettes, video cassettes were all over Turkey, and people listened to him on the radio, and people listened to him via the cassette in their cars” and from this, “you could definitely say they had their own personal inspiration from Hojaefendi, and most of that geared towards

education, towards schooling. His call is like the *adhan*, call to prayer; when you hear it you attend to it.” Building out from this, Haylamaz noted that there was an organic development within a community of mutual sharing and learning:

There were different foundations and institutions that were affiliated with Hizmet. For example, I was first working for the Yamanlar College in Izmir, and I was in charge of the dormitory. But I also used to meet with the Principals of other schools, or the directors of other dorms that I knew were affiliated with Hizmet, and we used to organise workshops together so that we knew and learned from one another how to solve problems with better conditions, better facilities, better services to students, how to help them develop certain skills etc. But in those matters where we felt we disagreed, those of us who were closer, we would come and ask Hojaefendi’s opinions.

To some extent, especially these early developments from Hizmet par-took, at least in part, of what might be called a ‘copy-paste’ approach that is now increasingly being questioned within Hizmet (Weller 2022, Sect. 6.8). As Haylamaz explained it, “Often a project started in one district, others copied them. For instance, schools like, Fatih, Yamanlar, Samanyolu were very successful and well-established. Schools in other provinces started taking their name and model as a franchise.” However, despite this, Haylamaz argued that there was nothing automatic or purely replica-tive about such a process, explaining that, “And we moved these projects on to other countries, and we had a brainstorming session, and ideas shared with Hizmet people in those countries. And when they agreed with the idea they took on the project, and when they don’t, they don’t.” As a more contemporary example of this process, Haylamaz noted that:

Last year we wanted to have these reading contests on the life of the Prophet in Egypt, in Indonesia. But our friends there were not able to do it. We hope this time we can do it, and we hope to develop a more agreeable project. We are having conversations with the friends there and we will see if they will be convinced and well, then will take it on, otherwise we will see. When some-thing becomes successful, others model it.

2.7 EUROPE, TURKISH EURASIA, AND BEYOND

Öztürk explained that it was while he was in Izmir that Gülen made his first contacts with Europe: “In 1970s he also travelled in Germany, in the western Europe, so he had an initial encounter with the western world” albeit that this was only for the month of Ramadan during which the Diyanet assigned him as an official *imam* to travel and to preach to the Turkish faithful in Germany. One of the anonymous translators of Öztürk, and who came from the UK, added to this that Gülen visited the UK in 1992, 1994, and 1996, although not for long visits, and that he also visited the Netherlands and France as well as a number of other countries where there were sizeable Turkish populations.

During the time that Gülen visited Germany there was considerable conflict among mosques of different Islamic groups and backgrounds (Weller 2022, Sect. 3.3) and it is possible that this experience had some influence in confirming and strengthening what was a growing conviction that he had originally developed in the Turkish context about the relative importance, contextually, of building schools rather than mosques and which was crystallised into his famously startling and challenging aphorism that “Turkey doesn’t need more mosques but more schools.” As suggested by Kurucan (for more context, see Weller 2022, Sects. 3.2 and 5.7), it seems likely that his visit to the Netherlands, where the secular women’s movement was particularly strong in opening up new social and religious opportunities for women, may have contributed to a new development in Gülen’s thinking around the role of women within Hizmet.

Then came another decade of development arising out of the political changes at the end of the Cold War when the former Soviet Union was, in 1991, dissolved and succeeded in terms of legal personality by the Russian Federation and the emergence of other former Soviet Republics as independent post-Soviet states. In relation especially to the former Turkic Republics of the Soviet Union, Tekalan quoted Gülen as saying, “We know the people there, we should go to those countries and share our educational experiences with those people and start to open schools in these countries.” In relation to this, close associate of Gülen and interviewee, Hakan Yeşilova (see Acknowledgements) also commented of Gülen that:

Hojaefendi always said we learned our religion from Central Asian scholars, Bukhari, and they were the ones who really formulated the Hadith

scholarship. And the heritage of Islamic knowledge exists today thanks to their very uniquely delicate, academically sensitive work. So, we owe it back to those nations, they are deprived of anything, and that includes business, most and foremost, education and schools. So, I think, he mobilised his followers to go there to start business as well as to start schools.

As Tekalan emphasised, “These schools were secular schools” and “They weren’t religious schools.” In Turkey, the curricula of Hizmet schools were in line with the broader Turkish education system. In other countries, a similar programme was used with some enrichments and, as Tekalan reports, “In these countries, people quickly witnessed the success of these people and everyone was very happy with these results” because “As well as the educational achievements of children in these schools, the improvement in their behaviour was also noteworthy.” According to Tekalan, these initiatives then developed further into university level with the establishment of Kafkas University in Azerbaijan in 1992, following which universities also opened in Georgia, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Russia. In Albania there were two universities—Epoca and Badr University.

In Turkey itself, in 1996, Fatih University was founded of which, as previously noted, Tekalan became President (2010–2016), having previously been a member of the Higher Education Executive Committee (1992–1996) overseeing all the universities in Turkey. He had previously been Chair of the International Association of Universities (also 1992–1996) in relation to which he explained that “We held congresses every year on innovations, accreditation activities and many other topics related to higher education issues” and to these congresses “We were also inviting rectors, university professors. Not just from our own universities, but from Harvard, England and the Far East.” In relation to this transition first into the wider Turkic regions of the former Soviet Union, and then into a wider global development, CAI recounted that:

I remember seeing these students coming from Central Asia to study at Fatih College when I was a senior there. And I later learned they came under a ‘Student Exchange’ programme. Some Turkish kids were sent to Central Asia to attend college in those countries. Probably they were again on scholarships by Hizmet philanthropists for I imagine many families would not be able to send their kids to Turkey. It was the time when

these new Republics were emerging, like, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, from what used to be the Soviet Union.

In reflection on this, with the benefit of hindsight, Yeşilova summaratively commented that, “I think that Hojaefendi always had this in his mind, not to remain in Turkey, but to interact with the rest of the world.” Whether or not this was indeed the case, Kurucan says that:

When Hojaefendi came to Europe, the United States and also Australia, it was a long tour. He went to Germany ...that was the first time in Germany, but that was a limited period for Ramadan and it was, again, intensely related to the Ramadan time. But he was now moving out to see what is happening in the world, to visit friends, or perhaps for other reasons. He is now expanding his vision even more in Europe, in the United States, and in Australia, and I think that was a milestone, where really you could see it had changed his vision.

Following this, Gülen challenged people to travel to the Far East and to the countries of Africa, and eventually Hizmet schools also reached Latin American countries and Australia. From the 1990s onwards, they had also reached European countries of Turkish migration, as well as to the USA where many young people from Hizmet went especially for their post-graduate education.

2.8 ‘ENEMY OF THE STATE’

In the eyes of those opposed to Gülen and Hizmet, Gülen’s vision of developing a “Golden Generation” of pious young Muslims fully engaged in all contexts and at all levels in society through educational development was interpreted as an attempt to take over the state in a sinister way. Therefore, instead of being seen as a figure offering a route to combining Islamic scholarship, piety, and socially engaged action, he was seen as an ‘enemy of the state.’ This interpretation can especially be referenced to recordings made and broadcast on Turkish TV on 18 June 1999, of Gülen speaking about Hizmet people “moving through the arteries of the state,” but in relation to which, defenders of Gülen argue that the original form and context were tampered with and the intentions misinterpreted. These broadcast recordings were the cited basis for the measures taken against Gülen that were, in the first instance, initiated by Kemalist forces in the state and which led, in 1999, to the commencement of a legal process against Gülen (Harrington 2011), which in turn formed a significant part of the context for his departure from Turkey to the USA in the same year.

Under this process, on 18 March 1999, the Ankara Chief of Police sent a letter to the Presidency of the Inspecting Council and the Presidency of the Intelligence Department on the subject of “Fethullah Gülen and the Light (Işık) Sect.” In this, the question was asked whether this grouping had an organisational structure, and whether it aimed at destroying the existing Constitutional order of the State in order to establish a system based on the *shariah*, in particular through a systematic attempt to take over institutions such as the Police Academy. On 3 August 2000, the Ankara Prosecutor asked the court to issue an arrest warrant against Gülen. At a second attempt on 22 August 2020, the Ankara State Security Court accepted an indictment of 22 August 2000 that charged Gülen with an offence under Article 7/1 of the *Anti-Terror Law* which, if proved, carried a sentence of up to 10 years’ imprisonment. However, by 28 August, the arrest warrant in absentia was lifted. Nevertheless, a trial commenced in the Ankara State Security Court on 16 October 2000 and ended on 10 March 2003. Under Law 4616, the case was suspended on condition that the same offence would not be committed within the next five years.

After changes in 2003 to Article 1 of the *Anti-Terror Law* which had added a condition that an act of violence needed to have been used in order for it to be treated as a terrorist offence, on 7 March 2006, Gülen’s lawyers asked for a retrial on the basis that their client had to be acquitted since there was no evidence that he had ever used violence. This had closely followed a request made by Gülen’s defence lawyers to the General Directorate for Security as part of their right to see evaluations made of foundations, associations, and educational institutions cited as being related to Gülen and the answer that had been as received on this as of 3 March 2006, which was signed by the Deputy Director for Security. That answer had stated that the institutions cited could not be evaluated under Article 1 of the *Anti-Terror Law* since there was no evidence that they had gathered in order to change the Constitutional order of the State. Up to a hearing on 5 May 2006 at the Ankara 11th High Criminal Court (which had replaced the Ankara State Security Court), the Prosecutor was still pressing for a conviction, but the court ruled in favour of an acquittal and, on 5 March 2008, the 9th Criminal Bureau of the Supreme Court of Appeals (Court of Cassation) finally confirmed the acquittal.

However, it was also the case that years earlier, Gülen had also been seen by others as an ‘enemy of the state.’ This was because in each decade during which he lived in Turkey, Gülen’s life and work was regularly punctuated by coups and other episodes of military intervention. This included

the traditional military coups of 27 May 1960; 12 March 1971; and the 12 September 1980. But also, on 28 February 1997, what some have described as a “post-modern” coup took place, in which the political branch of the military, the National Security Council, issued a Memorandum following which a series of political resignations took place and a range of restrictions were re-imposed on religious practice. In similar vein, in 2007, the General Staff issued an E-Memorandum on its website highlighting its position as a defender of secularism and commenting on the Presidential elections, following which the elections failed and a new General Election took place. Finally, on 15 July 2016, there was what, according to one’s evaluative perspective, is generally known as either a “failed coup,” a “silent coup,” or a “staged coup.”

When Gülen was asked in interview about what it meant for him to try to hold onto what he articulated as the central theme of love in his teaching in the context of having lived through such periods of military rule and imprisonment, he explained that:

I never held through those difficult years, I never held grudges against anybody. I never took account of who did what to me. I forgot them, I forgot what they did. They simply displayed their character through their actions and I was trying to live the example that I had seen in the previous exemplary people. I tried to live my life and to stay true to my values. I lived through the military coup of 1960, 27 May. I lived through the coup of 1971, where I was actually imprisoned.

In the period of military rule following that imprisonment, just as the Hizmet educational institutions were beginning to be developed, Haylamaz pointed out that, “Hojefendi increased his efforts even though he himself was being sought after by the coup junta, even at that time when there was an arrest warrant, when he was in posters along with forty or fifty terrorists who are under capital punishment, Hojafendi was among them.” And, as Gülen himself testified of this period, “In 1980 they followed me for six years and then eventually they caught me. But the Prime Minister at the time, Ozal, intervened and simply asked, you know, why are you after this person and they had to release me. But I basically I was evading arrest and detention for six years.”

In the case of the events of July 2016, however, Gülen and those inspired by him were themselves directly accused by the Presidency and government of having conspired together with elements in the military to

bring about what happened in Turkey on 15 July 2016. Among publications that have straightforwardly supported the government's narrative about this is Mohy (M. I.) Qandour's (2017), *Night of the Generals: The Story of 2016 Failed Military Coup in Turkey*, while Hakan Yavuz and Bayram Balcı (2008) edited collection of essays on *Turkey's July 15th Coup: What Happened and Why?* presents an academically more nuanced and varied picture, albeit with none of the authors fundamentally questioning the government's narrative.

In evaluating the events of July 2016, this author would argue that the gap that exists between this charge and the explicit and on the record teachings of Gülen that pertain to coups, to democracy and to how people should relate to one another in society, is so great that for Gülen to support, and still more to initiate such a coup, would require the employment of a deception of a very substantial and deliberate kind. Although it is not the purpose of this book either to focus on what happened on 15 July 2016 or to arrive at a definitive judgement about it, bearing in mind that there are those who, in connection with this cite the Islamic tradition of *al taqiyya* (which, in certain circumstances, allows the performance of a kind of holy deception), it remains at least theoretically possible that a substantial gap could exist between what is being said in public and plotted in private.

However, in relation to this, another fundamental question to consider is the one that is posed in the sub-title of an article on "The Gülen Community," by Thomas Michel (2017), a Jesuit Christian priest who, from 1981 to 1994, worked as Head of the Vatican's Office for relations with Muslims and also lived and worked in Turkey over many years. In this article, Michel posed the questions of "Who to Believe? Politicians or Actions?" and suggested that the vast majority of people who have practical and concrete experience of Hizmet's initiatives to overcome ignorance, conflict, and poverty do not find this credible. Therefore, overall, in the light of the substantial evidence of Hizmet's multiple services to education, dialogue, and the relief of poverty, and clear evidence that Gülen's teachings are truly rooted in the sources and wellsprings of Islam, and not the kind of modernist reinterpretation that seeks to use Islam as a tool to transform society or the state from above, there seems to this author to be such a gap between this and the claims of the Turkish authorities that, until anyone produces specific evidence to suggest to the contrary, the application to Gülen and to Hizmet of the Christian tradition's evaluative

criterion of “by their fruits you will know them” would seem to be appropriate.

This is not to say that no individuals who looked to Gülen and/or to Hizmet for inspiration might, in some way, have participated in the events of July 2016. Indeed, as will be seen below, some Hizmet asylum-seekers interviewed by the author have acknowledged this possibility. But, overall, it should be noted that the present author’s general evaluation of this is, in the end, more in line with that of Bruno Kahl (2017), the head of the German intelligence service, the Bundesnachrichtendienst (BND). Kahl, when interviewed in *Der Spiegel*, said of the charges from the Turkish authorities that Gülen was behind the coup, “Turkey tried to convince us of that at every level. But so far they have not succeeded” while describing the Hizmet movement as “a civilian association that aims to provide further religious and secular education.” In relation to these events and the run up to them, asylum-seeker AS4, explained that:

I think nobody in the Hizmet movement has done a crime. But in Turkey, if a group grows up successfully it’s dangerous, perhaps people think. And Islamic ways – we come together and talk about Islam, which many people think is dangerous. And the government doesn’t look at these groups in a good way. So, it’s been a little bit like that in these years.

At the same time, although being clear in not holding Gülen personally, or the movement collectively, responsible for the coup, AS4’s husband, AS3, acknowledged that:

Two years before something occurred in the psychology of people even from, a bit from some people in the army, maybe, some people thought we have to do something, even from the movement, I think like that. They can be in that action. It’s not easy because they were still in jail and were not in that night in the action. But some small people from the movement were in that.

As AS4, added: “I don’t know how it has occurred. But I think about that, that maybe psychologically they thought that we had to do against Erdoğan maybe”—which suggests that at least these asylum-seekers thought that some associated with Hizmet in Turkey may have thought that they needed to be involved in some form of radical intervention

before Erdoğan attained an absolute power. At the same time, AS3 also noted that:

In the government I think they prepared some lists about this. For example, he has links to Fethullah Gülen movement etc – always they are taking notes about this. And then, after this happened in 2016, they have a chance to come against the movement – yes, it’s the chance to stop them because they were growing and coming into all parts of the life in Turkey. So they put out the lists that they had prepared before. For example, you put your money into Bank Asya, so you are guilty. But I put my money in Asya Bank, it’s not important. The government gives permission for this bank so it is a crime? Yes, it’s a crime. And giving your daughter to their school, yes, it’s a crime again.

Commenting on AS4’s observation that Erdoğan’s speedy evaluation of the events of July 2016 having been “a gift from Allah” (Lorentzen 2019), AS3 added the comment that, “It’s not easy to make sense of, but Erdoğan was very happy in that night. I saw some pictures. I think was ready for that. He knows something,” to which his wife, AS4 added, “It was planned.” From AS3’s perspective, “It is so similar to German history... Because the media is like this. Also, people like him so much. Also, in Germany people trusted Hitler, like that.” Furthermore, with reference to the Reichstag fire that many think was carried out deliberately in order to take power “Also, it looks like Hitler’s fire.” And there were other eerie parallels, including, for example, the burning of books with AS4 noting that “in these days, many books of Fethullah Gülen and Said Nursi were thrown away,” which her husband AS3 explained was because “It was a crime to have them.” In relation to this, his wife AS3 said: “And evidence of this terrorist group, no guns, nothing, but books. Terrorist group, you say, and books, how can it be? Because it is not a terrorist group! What can it be, it is very funny.” In some ways, of course, the state’s response is a reflection of the power of words. But, overall, as AS4 says “we thought it can’t be real. It’s a bad dream and we will wake up. But, no, it was real things.”

Commenting further on this, AS3 said “It can be real but still we don’t feel it is real. In the morning we are looking somewhere that someone comes and says it is not real. Two years have passed, but still we want that.” And AS4 went on “Like that, and genocide. It’s a kind of genocide going on in Turkey now. And we are looking in our mobile phones and it

is still continuing. Like us people are suffering, and it's very bad, and we wish and pray to God every day." At this point, AS4 started to cry and became distraught, and therefore AS3 took over to try to explain the kind of impact that has happened: Thus, although Turkey has had a lot of coups, as AS3 noted, in this instance:

The lists were prepared, because the second day of that night our General Director at my employment even though it was on a Sunday, called me and said "Come here." He had a written paper that was given to him, and he said, "I am so sorry, I am surprised to know this", but a list came here, on Sunday, after the Friday night, and this occurs on Sunday, "And tomorrow, on Monday, you will go to another department and you will be there for a time. You won't continue, and you can't come in on Monday". Because of this we were learning that those lists were ready. And after fifteen days we were working in a place, wondering what would happen to us, and after fifteen days they kick us out. And it is not easy to understand that night. But strange things occurred. But I don't know why they are blaming me that I am a member of an armed movement. Until that time I haven't been in any place that had guns or like that?! Also, I was very good, I thought. I became Deputy Director in my place because they told me you are a good and hard-working man, and we are making you a Deputy Director of this Department. I had many things that I did to my CV and they were good things. But in a night or a day I became terrorist.

And, therefore, overall:

It is not easy to understand. Many people also can't understand that we are a terrorist, overnight we became like this! It was not a night I think, maybe you know better than us, because the background is old, I don't know also what was happening in the background. But the government doesn't like this movement. Whether the reasons can be understood or not I don't know. But in relation to the Gülen, the President really had a good team for his plan to make all people terrorists. That night was so strange. After that I read some books that any soldier movement didn't operate like that. That one was so different.

NOTE

1. See Jewish Heritage Europe, “Great Synagogue in Edirne, Turkey reopens after restoration”, 26.03.2015. <https://jewish-heritage-europe.eu/2015/03/26/great-synagogue-in-erdine-turkey-reopens-after-restoration/>

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