

**The Nature and Role of Sufism in Contemporary Islam:  
A Case Study of the Life, Thought and Teachings of Fethullah Gülen**

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## ABSTRACT

Title: The Nature and Role of Sufism in Contemporary Islam: A Case Study of the Life,

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The resurgence of Sufism in the contemporary world has necessitated reexamining the nature and role of Sufism in contemporary contexts. A series of the reexaminations reveal that contemporary Sufism cannot be fully explained by traditional theories; instead it must be understood in accordance with changing contexts. On this basis, this dissertation directs itself to an investigation of the contemporary manifestations of Sufism. It specifically examines Sufism in the life, thought and teachings of Fethullah Gülen (b. 1941), as its case study. Gülen is known to be one of the most influential contemporary Muslim leaders, and has led a fast-growing movement expanded to global proportions. Much of the research that has consequently followed the inception of the growth of the movement presents Gülen as one of the major figures in defining the contemporary global Islamic experience, and suggests that the studies of Gülen contribute to a better understanding of contemporary issues in Islamic studies including the resurgence and transformation of Sufism. Remarkably, almost all of the studies on Gülen and the Gülen movement underline the importance of further research on Gülen's approach to Sufism. Terms like 'quasi-Sufism' and 'neo-Sufism' are assigned

to his thought, while such phrases as ‘a Sufi order,’ ‘a Sufi-oriented movement’ and ‘a Nurcu branch in the Naqshbandiyya’ are circulated to characterize his movement. However, this terminology has not been adequately examined by any extensive research to warrant its justification. This dissertation examines Gülen’s view on Sufism in order to understand how Sufism manifests itself in contemporary contexts, addressing what Sufism means in the contemporary world. Viewing Sufism as a dynamic discipline interacting with given contextual conditions, I primarily argue that there are distinctive characteristics of Sufism that appeal to the contemporary world enough to allow Sufism to resurface; it is necessary to identify those characteristics to understand the nature and role of Sufism in contemporary Islam. Gülen’s Sufism, as an outcome of its interaction with a contemporary context, provides a better understanding of the characteristics in a way that it represents one of the contemporary manifestations of Sufism.

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## A NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION

I have used the Arabic rather than the Turkish transliteration for common Islamic terms, rendering in Arabic form and vocalization most Islamic terms covering conceptual, group and ritual names. For example, I have written *tasawwuf* rather than *tasavvuf*, *Naqshbandiyya* rather than *Nakşibendilik*, and *sama* rather than *sema*. The compromised words of the modern Turkish orthography with the English alphabet are used for the English spellings such as *Fethullahcılar*. However, bearing in mind that *Gülen* and the *Gülen* movement are the primary focus in this dissertation, a Turkish preference has been given to terms, especially those that are used as symbolic vocabularies in the movement. For instance, rather than *khidma*, I have retained *hizmet* to indicate its specific usage in the movement. In addition, the Turkish spelling has been retained for some common nouns like *tekke*. For the sake of reading convenience for those who are not familiar with Turkish, I would like to note the pronunciations of seven Turkish consonants and vowels; the Turkish ‘c’ is read as ‘j’ (like *Hocaefendi* as *Hojaefendi*); ‘ç’ as ch (like *charity*); ‘ğ’ unvocalized vowel; ‘ı’ as i in *bird*; ‘ö’ German ö, as in *schön*; ‘ş’ as sh in *short*; ‘ü’ German ü, as in *Führer*. To reduce clutter somewhat, I have written well-recognized words (*tariqa*, *shaykh*, *Sufi*) without italic.

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## INTRODUCTION

The Islamic revival in the contemporary world includes the resurgence of Sufism. This phenomenon is quite contrary to what many modern specialists on Sufism predicted that the more societies become modernized and industrialized, Sufism and Sufi orders (tariqas) would gradually disappear. The observance of the resurgence of Sufism not only falsifies this prediction but also has led scholars to reexamine the nature and role of Sufism in contemporary contexts. A series of such reexaminations point out that contemporary manifestations of Sufism cannot be fully explained by traditional categorizations, and instead must be understood in accordance with changing conditions.

The present dissertation aims to investigate the nature and the role of Sufism in a contemporary context. As its case study, this dissertation examines Sufism in the life, thought and teachings of Muhammad Fethullah Gülen (b. 1941). Gülen has been known as one of the most influential Muslim leaders in contemporary Turkey. The Gülen movement that he established about forty years ago and has guided now becomes an international Islamic movement. A recent work on Gülen's thought and the Gülen movement edited by John Esposito and Hakan Yavuz<sup>1</sup> presents Gülen as one of the major figures in defining the contemporary global Islamic experience, and the Gülen movement as one of the most significant religious movements emergent in Turkey in the past fifty years. It further suggests that careful research of the movement would provide a case study for investigating the contemporary issues in religious studies and particularly in

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<sup>1</sup> Hakan Yavuz and John Esposito (eds.), *Turkish Islam and the Secular State: The Gülen Movement* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2003).

Islamic studies, and a better understanding of the issues in almost all important aspects, including the resurgence of Islam and the transformation of Islam in ever changing social contexts. The work specifically raises a need of further research on Gülen's idea of Sufism with an assertion that "understanding the genesis of the [Gülen] movement and its significant permutations necessitates a consideration of the formative role of Sufi tradition in general and of Said Nursi in particular."<sup>2</sup> In light of this and other studies, this dissertation examines Sufism in Gülen's thought/life and the Gülen movement in order to identify and understand the nature and role of contemporary Sufism.

#### The Summary of the Problem and Thesis

The success of the Gülen movement in public spheres in Turkey and the rapid expansion of its activities over the globe have drawn academic attention and formed a trend of studies. A close examination of the trend, however, puts forward significant problems that obscure the clarity of Gülen's ideas and the identification of his movement.

Almost all studies at issue do not hesitate to call the movement 'a tariqa,' 'a Sufi-oriented movement' or 'a Nurcu branch in the Naqshbandiyya,' and to classify Gülen's thought into categories such as 'quasi-Sufism' or "neo-Sufism.' The problem in these widely-held names lies in the fact that there is no extensive research on Sufism in Gülen's thought and his movement. Thus, from the outset, this fact raises a critical question on the justification of the terminology. Further, whether or not one places Gülen

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid, vii.

and his movement in relation to Sufism might be less important than interrogating what the names mean. Regarding the term Sufism itself, there is at least a dichotomous view, which sees Sufism as an essential component of Islam or as a distorted and distorting discipline of Islam. This polemical perspective appears vividly in the modern Turkish context, which has served as the back and fore ground of Gülen's idea of Sufism. The ban of all activities of Sufi orders by the Kemalist Republic of laicism had produced an image problem of Sufism. Since then, the title of a Sufi movement has been used and accepted with a negative connotation. Given this, then, the intentions or the implications of using the aforementioned names for Gülen's thought and his movement are questionable and speculative from an academic perspective.

A close look at the trend reveals a developmental phrase and direction of the studies on Gülen and his movement. The political investigations since the 1980s to identify Gülen's alleged political Islam project initiated a series of studies. These early studies exclusively focused on the political implications of the Gülen movement from the standpoint of political discipline and discourse. They presented a common picture of Gülen as a Sufi shaykh, who called people and organized them into a divisional sect of tariqa for a secret but ultimate aim to establish a Shari'a state, challenging and threatening the secular regime of the Turkish Republic. However, the studies display an easily notable flaw in their approaches, i.e., an apriori stance, which exclusively relies on the negative image of tariqas enforced by the Kemalist Republic. Against this aggressive claim, a group of apologetic studies came out to stress a non-political and non-tariqa identity of the Gülen movement. The reactionary nature that is reflected in the approaches of these studies, yet, makes their outcomes difficult to accept academically. These two

contradictory approaches dominated the controversial debate on the issues related to Gülen and his movement, producing less constructive academic results. Later, besides these two paralleling studies emerged a third group of scholars, who employed more academically rigorous methods. Yet, rather than directly dealing with the politicized issue of the tariqa-associated Gülen movement, these studies attempted to discern the reasons of the success of the movement. They underline some characteristics of the movement such as Gülen's vision of moderate Islam and his emphasis on dialogue, the education-based strategy of the movement. More recently, a number of studies began to reassess Gülen and his movement's tendency toward Sufism. All of them implicitly and explicitly agreed upon Gülen's conviction of Sufism, but they dissent in identifying the Gülen movement. Some directly opposed the tariqa-associated confinement of the movement, while others preferred to consider it as a new manifestation of tariqa. Undeniably, these two kinds of recent studies have contributed to a better understanding of Gülen's thought and the movement. Nevertheless, there is a certain need for sufficient information to address the complexity of the issues. In particular, the recent studies, which have outlined Gülen's idea of Sufism, underscore the necessity of the topic to be examined by further extensive research.

Responding to this situation and as a comprehensive study of Gülen's Sufism, I hypothesize that there are distinctive characteristics of Sufism that appeal to the contemporary world enough to allow Sufism to resurface: it is necessary to identify those characteristics to understand the nature and role of Sufism in contemporary Islam: Gülen's Sufism provides a better understanding of the characteristics in a way that it represents one of the contemporary manifestations of Sufism. To substantiate this

hypothesis, I will demonstrate that Sufism has played a significant role in Gülen's life/thought and the Gülen movement: it serves as a motivation of his life (motivational role), shapes his thought (formative role) and informs his movement (practical role). In so doing, the relationship between Gülen's Sufism and his movement would be made to clarify the inner dynamics of the movement. In sharp contrast to many studies that attribute the appeal of Gülen's thought and the success of his movement to extrinsic factors like an outcome of socio-political conditions or a hierarchical system of command, I will seek the relational role of Sufism between Gülen and his followers, which might be the intrinsic reason of the movement's success.

#### Methodology and Sources

This thesis will be verified primarily by the following three methods.

First, a textual analysis is employed as the founding method. As the primary sources, the dissertation analyzes Gülen's own works. Among his over forty books, a series of his study on Sufism and its terminology entitled *Kalbin Zümriit Tepeleri (Emerald Hills of the Heart: Key Concepts in the Practice of Sufism)*<sup>3</sup> is a focus. A cumulative body of the existing studies on Gülen and his movement is also examined. Particularly, in the situation that there has been no extensive research placing Sufism and Gülen in connection, I take into consideration Zeki Sarıtoprak's essay "Fethullah Gülen:

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<sup>3</sup> Gülen, M. Fethullah, *Kalbin Zümriit Tepeleri*, Vol 1, 2 and 3 (Istanbul: Nil Yayinlari).

A Sufism in His Own Way”<sup>4</sup> as a pioneering work that introduces the place of Gülen in the Sufi tradition for the first time in academia. Along with these studies, I analyze contemporary theories and field studies particularly in relation to the ‘decline and resurgence of Sufism’ and contemporary manifestations of Sufism.

Second, I utilize a contextual analysis to properly locate Gülen’s Sufism. Broadly speaking, I use the contextual analysis in light of the concept ‘contextuality’ as clarified in the theories of Michel Foucault, Edward Said and Clifford Geertz. Using the metaphor of the relation of a picture to its frame, Foucault signifies the influence of framing on how we see the images in a picture.<sup>5</sup> While both applying and criticizing this notion in his theory of Orientalism, Said argues that the realities of social contexts are the realities, which make texts possible, and which deliver them to their readers.<sup>6</sup> Basically concurring with this view, I follow Geertz’s assertion: “Believing, with Max Weber, that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning.”<sup>7</sup> Employing the contextual analysis along this line, this dissertation takes account of relevant framing contexts that inform Gülen’s approach to Sufism.

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<sup>4</sup> Zeki Sarıtoprak, “Fethullah Gülen: A Sufi in His Own Way,” in *Turkish Islam and the Secular State: The Gülen Movement*, eds. Hakan Yavuz and John Esposito (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2003), 156-169.

<sup>5</sup> See, Michel Foucault, *This is Not a Pipe* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983).

<sup>6</sup> Edward Said, *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983).

<sup>7</sup> Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books 1973), 5.

Last, but distinctively, I employ Sufism itself as a methodological lens. I hold that Sufism is not just an object of study but can be an analytical tool, which allows one to see Sufism-related phenomena as they are, without necessarily reducing them to any pre-confined ‘other’ framework - such as sociological, anthropological, psychological or political economical disciplines. Relevantly, I use ‘Sufism’ in a descriptive sense, indicating a wide range of varieties and developments rather than a rigidly labeled doctrine or movement. This consideration precludes my examination on Gülen’s Sufism from the possible danger of arbitrarily confining it to one particular view or narrow definition. Instead, it allows me to encompass diverse manifestations of and different approaches to Sufism. This broad approach is of paramount importance to depict Gülen’s Sufism, as it is often equated with ‘quasi-Sufism’ or ‘neo-Sufism.’ Proceeding from this, I contend Seyyed Hossein Nasr’s suggestion that “in its essence Sufism has no history. However, since at each epoch it has presented its principles in a language confirming to the general mental and psychological conditions of that age..., it is possible to speak of the distinct features of the Sufi tradition in each period.”<sup>8</sup> Although I do not intend to ignore the ahistorical essence of Sufism that Sufis have considered to be an invisible animating force of individual and communal Muslim life, to identify such an essence is certainly beyond my identity as a researcher. Rather, what I am concerned with is “the distinct features” of Sufism that are observable and make the invisible discernible. More specifically, in relating “the distinct features,” I seek to discern what distinct features of Sufism interact with contemporary contexts.

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<sup>8</sup> Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Three Muslim Sages* (Delmar, New York: Caravan Books, 1976), 85.



## Contribution to the field

For the most part, this dissertation contributes to the academic discourse surrounding Gülen's thought and his movement as well as the broader fields of Sufism, Islam and religion.

Above all, it contributes to fill up the lack of extensive research on Gülen's Sufism, providing implications for the existing Sufism-related issues and terms for Gülen's thought and his movement. As it aims, my analysis of Gülen's Sufism further contributes to understanding how Sufism manifests itself in contemporary contexts, addressing what Sufism means and how it appears in the contemporary world. It adds a case study to the collection of sufficient information for contemporary manifestations of Sufism, which, within the dramatically changing world, may well appear as the fourth stage beyond Trimingham's three stages of Sufi orders. Broadly, as Esposito and Yavuz suggest, this dissertation would contribute to a discussion of the contemporary issues in Islamic studies such as the topics of the Islamic revival and the changing modalities of Islamic movements. In this way, it amplifies the meaning and role of religion in the contemporary world as well.

## Outline of Chapters

Chapter 1 and 2 respectively examine Sufism in contemporary academic discourse and the history of Turkish Sufism. These chapters contextualize the theoretical

and cultural framework in which Gülen's Sufism will be located. In Chapter 1, I readdress crucial debates and problems in the study of Sufism, which will be not only utilized for an identification of Gülen's Sufism but also evaluated for their validity. I then trace the history of Turkish Sufism, making salient its constructional factors and distinctive characteristics, which enables me to figure out the historical and cultural roots of Gülen's Sufism.

Chapter 3, "Sufism in Gülen's life," attempts to assess the impact of Sufism in Gülen's life. For this, the chapter looks at Gülen's family and regional background, early education, life career as an imam, teacher and leader, and lifestyle. In this analysis, Sufi elements that shaped Gülen's personal background are put forward, illuminating how deeply Sufism formed his life.

How does Gülen define and describe Sufism? What specific Sufism informs Gülen's thought? Is his view on Sufism different from other Sufis' idea and scholarly definitions? Put simply, what Sufism is he talking about? These questions are the concern of Chapter 4, "The nature of Sufism in Gülen's thought." The findings put forth by this focal examination are highlighted in the proposing of some remarkable characteristics of Gülen's Sufism. On this basis, the highly controversial question of whether he is a Sufi will be reassessed.

Chapter 5, "The place of Sufism in the Gülen movement," explores the practical appearance of Gülen's Sufism in the Gülen movement. Specifically, the chapter places its focus on two aspects of the movement. On the one hand, the conceptual manifestations of Gülen's Sufism in the identity, organizational structure and activities of the movement are examined. On the other hand, I focus on the religious acts of the members in both the

individual and communal sense. By this, I illustrate that Gülen's Sufism, as an embodied and embedded spirituality of the members' lives, serves to bind them to the movement and motivate them to actively participate in its activities.

The concluding chapter synthetically reflects on Gülen's Sufism within the context of the resurgence of Sufism in the contemporary world. This reflection highlights the distinctiveness of Gülen's Sufism as the intrinsic reason for the appeal of Gülen's thought and the success of his movement. To this extent, I put forward that Gülen's Sufism is a contributor to and a representation of the resurgence of Sufism.

## CHAPTER 1

### CONTEMPORARY DISCOURSE ON SUFISM

Sufism is the path followed by an individual who, having been able to free himself or herself from human vices and weaknesses in order to acquire angelic qualities and conduct pleasing to God, lives in accordance with the requirements of God's knowledge and love, and in the resulting spiritual delight that ensues. Sufism is based on observing even the most 'trivial' rules of the Shari'ah in order to penetrate their inner meaning.

- Fethullah Gülen<sup>1</sup>

This is Muhammad Fethullah Gülen's concise yet concrete definition of Sufism, which has been at the core of his on-going writings of Sufism since 1990. For me, it was this definition that has continually conflicted with my preconception of Sufism, but had initiated my engagement with and further led me to research Gülen's Sufism. In light of contemporary consensus that academic research is intrinsically reflected by the scholar's own conscious and/or unconscious perceptions, let me clarify first the experiential reality, which has shaped my approach to the study of Sufism, and as such, will identify my own contextual limitation and ideological biases in this dissertation.

South Korea is where I first learned about Islam twenty-two years ago. At that time, the Middle Eastern especially Saudi Arabian forms of Islam and its concomitant *Dawa* (Islamic missionary activity) method was predominant.<sup>2</sup> In this socio-educational

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<sup>1</sup> Fethullah Gülen, *The Emerald Hills of the Heart: Key Concepts in the Practice of Sufism* (Izmir: Kaynak, 1998), 2.

<sup>2</sup> Although Turkey was the first country to seed Islam into the modern Korean peninsula through its troops during the Korean War, the full-scale growth of the Muslim community in South Korea occurred thanks to the interest and assistance of both Islamic countries and the Korean government throughout the 1960's and 70's. In particular, the political economic context in which the Oil Crisis of the early 70's led the then Korean government to cooperate with Saudi Arabia accelerated the interest of Koreans toward Islam and resulted in building the first Mosque in South Korea, Seoul Central Mosque, in 1976. Ever since then, Saudi Arabia has become a prominent country in assisting the Korean Muslim community both economically and theologically. Remarkably, its featured Islam and *dawa* method have played a determinant role in the Korean conversion experience and the Korean image of Islam. For the history of

context, my initial learning was a sort of rigid legalist Islam, which formulated my preconception and later my imperative idea of Islam. In particular, the concept of *haram* (unlawful or forbidden according to Islamic law) was rooted in my consciousness more firmly than any other Islamic concepts, largely because of my experience of discrepancy between the religious ideal of Islam and the cultural reality of Korea.<sup>3</sup> Within such a category of *haram* also lies my preconception of Sufism. In retrospect, I do not have any memory of learning about Sufism save that to mention it was a sort of taboo (*haram*). Since then, this ignorant yet still negative image of Sufism had precipitated in my unconsciousness so deeply as to hinder me from any approach to Sufism. For this reason, there is no wonder that during my three-year study of Islam at Al-Azhar University, Egypt, I consciously and unconsciously avoided facing Sufism.

My direct encounter with Sufism occurred in Turkey, where I spent another three years completing my master's program in the Theology Department of Marmara University, Istanbul. Everywhere, from the theology campus to my living environment,<sup>4</sup>

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Islam in South Korea, see, Yoon K Sun, *Islam in Korea* (Hartford, 1971), and, Hee S. Lee, *İslam ve Türk Kültürünün Uzak Doğu'ya Yayılması* [The Diffusion of Islam and Turkish Culture in the Far East] (Ankara, 1988). Specifically for the Korean conversion experience, see, Heon C. Kim, *Din Değiştirmenin Entellektual Arka Planı* [The Intellectual Background of Religious Conversion] (Istanbul: Isik Yayinlari, 2004).

<sup>3</sup> As a representative example of such cultural and religion conflict, my research shows 'non-drinking alcohol' experience. As the majority of Korean Muslims unanimously have reported, their practice of 'no drinking alcohol' had very often worsened their relationship with non-Muslim Koreans. In fact, to drink alcohol is an essential part of Korean society in maintaining social relationship. For the detail of this problem and other conflicts between Islam and Korean culture, see, my empirical study, *Din Değiştirmenin Entellektual Arka Planı*.

<sup>4</sup> 'Yunus Emre,' the renowned Turkish Sufi poet in the thirteenth century, is the name of building in which I took several courses. And, an apartment's name that I was staying at Istanbul was '*baqa*,' a reflection of the owner's hope to make it as a residence of those who shall 'remain in God.' This daily environment had constantly reminded me of Sufism especially in proportion to the increase of my knowledge of Sufism throughout my graduate course work.

was full of vivid traces of Sufism, which I daily confronted as a popularly practiced and culturally inherited Islam. At the beginning of this confrontation, my preconception with the taboo of Sufism was strengthened by experiencing irrational and illiterate forms of Sufism along with learning about the state opposition to Sufism. Having witnessed, for example, many ladies who gathered, muttered and wept around the tomb (*türbesi*) in the *Aziz Mahmud Hüddai* Mosque located in Üsküdar, and later hearing about Hüddai, a celebrated Sufi master, who once miraculously crossed over the Bosphorus Canal, I clung to the negative conception of Sufism. However, such an environment of ubiquitous Sufi traces provided me another Sufi reality as opposite to that negatively-imbedded image. Especially, Sufi colleagues and Sufi professors of mine,<sup>5</sup> through both their knowledge and behaviors, gradually turned me to face an ‘other’ Sufism, that is, sober one. The more I had contact with this kind of Sufism, the deeper I experienced an inner conflict between what I had learned and what I was then observing. Further, the conflict that I struggled against often ended up with questions about my overall knowledge of Islam.<sup>6</sup>

Amidst this inner turmoil of conflict, I came across Gülen’s idea of Sufism that is represented by the above-stated definition. Through my translation of his books, I was

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<sup>5</sup> Among such figures, Dr. Hasan Kamil Yılmaz, a professor of *tasawwuf* in the theology department of Marmara University and the chairman of *Aziz Mahmud Hüddai* Foundation (*Vakf*), is clearly printed in my memory, as he had greatly influenced my thought of Sufism both through his insightful lectures and impressive Sufi behaviors.

<sup>6</sup> This conflict urged me to find a resolution. Yet, to find such a resolution did not result in my imminent academic engagement with Sufism, because I was still too confused about non-Islamic and Islamic Sufism. Instead, I chose to specialize in Islamic psychology that enabled me to understand my own Islamic experience from the psychological perspective. Specifically, I focused on the conversion experience of Korean Muslims. While conducting interviews for this research, I found that, although Sufism has been neither known to Korean Muslims nor taken by them as positive, a notable number of my interviewees considered their mystical experiences as a major motivation for their conversion (see, *ibid*, 129-130, which discusses “peaceful heart,” “dreams” and “weeping in reading the Qur’an” as to be mystical experiences). Because of my inner conflict, this finding was so striking to me as to consider Sufism to be an innate Islamic religiosity, what I may call ‘Sufism without being taught and/or named.’

initially impressed by his modest interpretation of Islam in relation to non-Islamic cultures, mainly due to its contrariness to my preconception of a rigid Islam.<sup>7</sup> With such an impressed feeling, I met Gülen and studied his thought of Islam.<sup>8</sup> Remarkably, my inner struggle led my learning to center on his idea of ‘Islamic Sufism,’ which was brought into relief by my observation on his ascetic lifestyle and as such imprinted on my constructed image of ‘non-Islamic Sufism.’ In this confrontation with him in the environment of Turkish popular Sufism, I was preoccupied with a series of specific questions. Can Sufism as a whole be dismissed as a *bid’a* (innovation) or a distortion of Islam? Is Sufism non-Islamic or Islamic? Specifically, who are the Sufis, the ladies or the academicians or both? More relevantly to my then situation, is Gülen, who motivated me to consider Islamic Sufism, a Sufi, whom I had long tried avoiding?

As indicated in these questions, my experiential reality was filled with and reflected my confrontation and struggle with ambiguity in different manifestations of Sufism such as the non-Islamic, Islamic, irrational and rational. Having long strayed in that ambiguity, I came to realize that this ambiguity is closely linked to the dynamics of Sufism. For my experience, Sufism is a reality appearing diversely according to

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<sup>7</sup> I learned about him first through my translation of his book; Fethullah Gülen, *Hananim’ul Nuga Chang-jo Haytmunga?* [Who Created God] (Seoul: Alim Publication, 1999), translated from *Asrım Getirdiği Tereddütler I* (Izmir: Nil, 1998). As indicated in the published English title *Questions: This Modern Age Puts to Islam*, this work consists of Gülen’s interpretive answers to questions particularly raised in the relation between Muslims and non-Muslims.

<sup>8</sup> In 1999, I first met him at his residence, Çamlıca, Istanbul. His residence was called *Beşinci Kat* [the fifth floor], which, as Marcia Hermansen puts it, carries special meanings such as ‘sacred space for spiritual retreat’; see, Marcia Hermansen, “Understandings of ‘Community’ within the Gülen Movement,” paper presented at the conference, *Islam in the Contemporary World: The Fethullah Gülen Movement in Thought and Practice*, (Rice University, 2005). Available online at <http://fethullahgulenconference.org/houston/index.php>. accessed on April 17, 2008.

observers' different perceptions, as well as in different contexts.<sup>9</sup> It is in this concept of dynamic Sufism that I have situated my own ideological and academic position of Sufism. At the crux of such positioning lies my acknowledgement of dynamic Sufism that encompasses various realities and manifestations, especially in a way explicitly rejecting any monopolization of the term "Sufism" and any attempt to confine Sufism to a narrow or specific definition.

Concurrent with this position, I begin my research on Gülen's Sufism with an analysis of the existing diverse approaches to Sufism in contemporary discourse.<sup>10</sup> In analyzing, I underline the dynamic nature of Sufism that resonates in different scholarly interpretations of the complexities of the historical expression of Sufism and the diverse views of Sufis themselves.

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<sup>9</sup> This experience can be further clarified by a comparison to the famous fable of "The Elephant in the Dark" that is associated with Jalal al-Din Rumi and frequently circulated in the scholarship of Sufism. In some sense, my experience of Sufism echoes the fable as it is used to stress that "Sufism is so broad and its appearance so protean that nobody can venture to describe it fully"; Annemarie Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions of Islam* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1975), 3. However, in the sense that the fable presupposes 'the imperfection of individual perception,' my experience is different from the fable. For me, a single manifestation of Sufism has its own perfection in reflecting the whole truth, as evidenced in my research on Korean Muslims' mystical experience that demonstrates a self-generated perfect manifestation of Sufism in the little or, at best, negatively known context of Sufism. In this sense, my experience of the dynamics of Sufism is more like, so to speak, 'a broken mirror' that carries its function perfectly in reflecting truth.

<sup>10</sup> This chapter does not cover the whole history of classical Sufism; rather, it focuses on modern discourse to reveal its contemporary significance.



## 1.1 Foreign Origin Thesis of Sufism

Sufism is an English word translated from the Arabic term *tasawwuf*, which literally denotes “becoming a Sufi,”<sup>11</sup> and which has been commonly equated with “Islamic mysticism” or “Islamic esotericism” in western scholarship.<sup>12</sup> The introduction of the scholarly term “Sufism” into European languages and the consequent beginning of the modern study of Sufism date back to the eighteenth century.<sup>13</sup> A variety of the then existing European sources, mainly from travelers’ accounts of and exotic curiosity about *fakirs* (the Arabic word for “poor man”) and *dervishes* (the Turkish pronunciation of Persian *darvish* that means “standing by the door”), led eighteenth-century European scholars to pursue the study of Sufism. The usage of the two terms in scholarly circulation was preceded by the focus on the relationship of Sufis to Catholic monks and Hindu ascetics.<sup>14</sup> In particular, the poems of such as Hafiz of Shiraz (d.1389) and Jalal al-Din Rumi (d. 1273), which are literally filled with love, wine, music and dance, drew the scholars’ attention. Taking these references as their primary source, they identified Sufism with a sort of free-thinking, wine-drinking, erotic and pantheistic mysticism, and compared it to the Indo-Aryan religious traditions. The leading scholars in this line

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<sup>11</sup> Carl Ernst, “Tasawwuf,” *Encyclopedia of Islam and the Muslim World*, ed. Richard Martin, Vol. 2 (New York: Macmillan Reference USA, 2004), 684.

<sup>12</sup> William Chittick, “Sufism, Sufi Thought and Practice,” *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World*, ed. John L. Esposito, Vol. 4 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 102.

<sup>13</sup> Several scholars like Annemarie Schimmel (*Mystical Dimensions*, 7-8) have traced Europe’s first contact with Sufism that dates back to the Middle Ages. However, as those scholars and others establish, this contact remained only in occasional cases; full contact did not occur until later periods, most notably the colonial period (roughly 1750-1950), which has formed the overall Western image of Sufism.

<sup>14</sup> Carl Ernst, *The Shambhala Guide to Sufism* (Boston: Shambhala Publications, 1997), 3-8.

include William Jones, John Malcolm and James William Graham, who unanimously claimed that Sufism stemmed from Hindu yoga, Greek philosophy, or Christianity. Ever since then, the idea of the foreign origin of Sufism has been so widely accepted and further developed in Euro-American scholarship as to come into full bloom with an argument that Sufism originated from almost all religious traditions, including Indo-Aryan heritage, Neo-Platonism, Greek thought, Gnosticism, Manicheism, Christian ascetic monasticism, Jewish Kabbala, and Magianism.<sup>15</sup> Put simply, the essential character of Sufism according to the modern European discourse was a personal mysticism, which had no intrinsic relation to the faith of Islam.<sup>16</sup>

With the coming of the twentieth century, however, greater accessibility to original Sufi writings in Western languages has permitted a more critical evaluation of the idea of the foreign origin of Sufism. A number of scholars have pointed out that the idea was founded upon poor, inadequate and marginalized sources, mostly Persian Sufi poetry, and a lack of scientific analysis evidenced in the superficial, literalist

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<sup>15</sup> For a critical assessment of the historical development of the foreign origin thesis of Sufism in western scholarship, see, Arthur Arberry, A. *An Introduction to the History of Sufism* (New York: Longmans, Green & Co., 1942). In this monumental work, Arberry enumerates the theories on the origins of Sufism among the European scholars from the end of the eighteenth century to the middle of the twentieth century. Later scholars like Schimmel and Louis Massignon have added more detailed comments on the list of the concerned European scholars. See, Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions*) and Louis Massignon, *Essay on the Origins of the Technical Language of Islamic Mysticism*, trans. Benjamin Clark (Notre Dame.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1997).

<sup>16</sup> Representatively, John Brown, one of the eminent scholars in this period, asserts that “the spiritualism of the Darvishes differing in many respects from Islamism, and having its origin in the religious conceptions of India and Greece, perhaps the information I have been enabled to collect together on the subject may not be without interest to the reader. Much of this is original; and having been extracted from Oriental, and from Turkish, Arabic, and Persian MSS., may be relied upon as strictly accurate.” John P. Brown, *The Darvishes; or, Oriental spiritualism* (London: Cass, 1968, 1<sup>st</sup> ed. 1867), v.

interpretations of these sources.<sup>17</sup> This methodological pitfall is palpable in that a thorough examination of the original texts discredits the ‘foreign origin’ thesis and its sundry generalizations.<sup>18</sup> In recent years, this critique has been remarkably advanced by some studies which deconstruct the ‘foreign origin’ thesis from the perspective of Edward Said’s theory of *Orientalism*.<sup>19</sup> In this regard, the presentation of Sufism as non-Islamic mysticism is considered an orientalist product. It is an ideologically- and politically-motivated product undertaken in cooperation with dominant social attitudes against Islam and the concrete historical circumstances of colonialism. This contextual critique has subsequently remarked that the claim for a non-Islamic Sufism, as an orientalist product, is derived from a misperception of Islam as a homogenous prototype of a sterile and rigid system that is incapable of being the soil of Sufism.

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<sup>17</sup> See, Arberry, *An Introduction to the History of Sufism*, 8-26; and, Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions*, 8-12.

<sup>18</sup> Examining scholarly critique against the foreign origin thesis, Reynold Nicholson concludes that “modern study has proved that the origin of Sufism cannot be traced back to a single definite cause, and has largely discredited the sweeping generations which represent it, for instance, as a reaction of the Aryan mind against a conquering Semitic religion, and as a product essentially of Indian or Persian thought.” Reynold Nicholson, *The Mystics of Islam* (London: Routledge and Paul, 1963), 8.

<sup>19</sup> Although Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978) has been critically debated, some recent specialists of Sufism have applied it to deconstruct the European approach to Sufism. Especially, they concur with the theory that Orientalism functions to serve political ends and provides the construction of European identity by essentializing the Orient as a prototypical, monolithic whole. For a detailed analysis on the orientalist approach to Sufism, see, Carl Ernst, “Between Orientalism and Fundamentalism: Problematizing the Teaching of Sufism,” in *Teaching Islam*, ed. Brannon Wheeler (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 108-123 and *The Shambhala Guide to Sufism*, 8-18. See, also, Algis Uždavinys’s “Sufism in the Light of Orientalism” *Acta Orientalia Vilnensia*, Vol. 6 (2), 2005, 114-125), which depicts the historical contexts that gave birth to the orientalist idea of non-Islamic Sufism. Additionally, Julie Scott Meisami’s *Structure and Meaning in Medieval Arabic and Persian Lyric Poetry: Orient Pearls* (London; New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003) deserves mention. Applying Said’s *Orientalism* to depict the history of Hafiz translations in the western Orientalist scholarship, Meisami argues that the Oriental poetry is a construct of the imagination of ‘Orient’ fitting to the cultural identity of ‘West’ as exemplified in the changes made in the image of Hafiz.

Though the colonial period had ended and its discourse on Sufism has been strongly criticized, the idea of a foreign origin of Sufism has continually influenced postcolonial discourse on <sup>20</sup> and thus the western image of Sufism.<sup>21</sup> The currency of this phenomenon echoes a scholar's note from about a half-century ago, which states "materials for such a survey are all too copious, for the *silsila*, so to speak, founded by Sir William Jones and transmitted by Graham, Malcolm, and Tholuck, has attracted a multitude of enthusiastic adherents and now has affiliations in all parts of the world and in almost every languages."<sup>22</sup> Notably, this sweeping generalization of non-Islamic Sufism has been reinforced by modern Muslim opponents of Sufism.

While the European orientalist's idea may be identified as a non-Muslim external effort to bind Sufism with other religious traditions in a sympathetic attitude toward Sufism, the Muslim critique of Sufism represents an internal desire of some to exclude it from Islam, notably as seen in the anti-Sufi movement. Historically speaking, anti-Sufism is not a new modern phenomenon. Rather, it is a revivalist expression of the ongoing

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<sup>20</sup> As a typical instance, Robert Zaehner, with an uncritical quotation of Margaret Smith's thesis of the Christian origin of Sufism, explicitly states that "Muslim mysticism is entirely derivative; Its beginnings are unmistakably borrowed from Christianity with its overriding emphasis on love as being the very nature of God." Robert Zaehner, *Mysticism, Sacred and Profane; An Inquiry into Some Varieties of Praeter-natural Experience* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957), 160-161. More recently, Julian Baldick's claim for Christian origin of Sufism also shows its exclusive reliance on the orientalist scholarship without any direct examination of Sufi original writings; Julian Baldick, *Mystical Islam: an Introduction to Sufism* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1989), 13-33.

<sup>21</sup> To a certain extent, the relationship between the scholarly discourse and the popular western image of Sufism bears resemblance to Pierre Bourdieu's 'theory effect' in his *Language and Symbolic Power* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1991), which clarifies the operations of language involved in the formation, maintenance and movement of ideological distinctions, which creates a semantic feature of communication common in ideologies. Once named and thus semanticized in a way given by the Orientalist scholarship as outlined above, Sufism means to the influenced westerners non/beyond Islamic mysticism just as its non/beyond-rational nature. This consideration explains not only the western popular image of Sufism as a drunken manifestation, but further the western context that has observed a significantly growing number of the so-called 'non-Muslim Sufis' or 'pseudo-Sufism.'

<sup>22</sup> Arberry, *An Introduction to the History of Sufism*, 20.

dissatisfaction with and criticism of Sufism. As the foremost critic, Taqi al-Din Ahmad Ibn Taymiyyah (d. 1328), a Sunni Hanbali theologian in the medieval era, harshly criticized the dogmatic character of Sufi pantheism and its practice of saint veneration.<sup>23</sup> This critique has furnished a primary source for later Muslim opponents, especially the Wahhabi movement. Having been inspired by and reviving Ibn Taymiyyah's view, Muhammad b. Abd al-Wahhab (d. 1792) rejected Sufism totally in both its doctrinal and practical aspects. His observation of Sufis' veneration and idolatrous worship of their shaykhs led him to condemn Sufism as *shirk*, the serious sin of associating others with God against the Islamic fundamental concept of the Oneness of God (*tawhid*).<sup>24</sup> A number of prominent modern Islamists have inherited this critical stance toward Sufism. In their quest to purify the Muslim faith and in response to the modern context of Western colonialism, rationalization and modernization, Islamists associated with the line of Sayyid Jamal ad-Din al-Afgani (d. 1897), Muhammad Abduh (d. 1905), Muhammad Rashid Rida (d. 1935), Abu al-Ala Mawdudi (d. 1979), and Sayyid Qutb (d. 1966) considered Sufi doctrines and practices a non-Islamic innovation (*bid'a*) and superstition

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<sup>23</sup> Concerning Ibn Taymiyyah's opposition to Sufism, it is argued that Ibn Taymiyyah did not reject Sufism as a whole, as evidenced in his statement "the right attitude towards Sufism, or any other thing, is to accept what is in agreement with the Qur'an and the Sunna, and reject what does not agree"; *Majmu Fatawa Shaykh al-Islam Ibn Taymiyyah*, compiled by Abd al-Rahman al-Asimi and his son, Muhammad, Riyadh, vol. X, p. 82; cited from Abdul Haq Ansari, "Ibn Taymiyyah's Criticisms of Sufism," *Islam and the Middle Ages*, vol. 15 (1984), 147. See, also, George Makdisi's "Ibn Taimiya: A Sufi of the Qadiriya Order," *American Journal of Arabic Studies*, Vol I (1973), 118-129, and "Hanbalite Islam," in *Studies on Islam*, ed. and trans. Merlin L. Swartz (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), 216-264, both of which demonstrate that neither Ibn Taymiyyah nor other Hanbali jurists were opposed to Sufism as a whole.

<sup>24</sup> Elizabeth Sirriyeh, *Sufis and anti-Sufis: the Defense, Rethinking and Rejection of Sufism in the Modern World* (Richmond: Curzon, 1999), 1-26. For a detail of Abd al-Wahhab's approach to Sufism, see, Esther Peskes, "The Wahhabiyya and Sufism in the Eighteenth Century", in *Islamic Mysticism Contested: Thirteen Centuries of Controversies & Polemics*, eds. Fred de Jong and Bernd Radtke (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 145-161.

(*khurafa*) without any authentic basis in the Qur'an, the Sunna and the Shari'a.<sup>25</sup> Sufism with its master-disciple tradition of blind obedience to and imitation (*taqlid*) of shaykhs, whose meditation and irrational miracles were believed to work as intercession between God and humanity, and its related practices such as the veneration of and local pilgrimage to the tombs of supposed Sufi saints and certain forms of meditation (*dhikr*), proved to them to be not only composed of idolatrous innovations but also harboring superstitions that disgraced Islam. Firmly believing that with their doctrines and practices, Sufis promote fatalism, otherworldliness and social withdrawal instead of active engagement in reality, the Islamists condemned Sufism as a root of backwardness and weakness for Muslims. In short, for the Islamists, Sufism is not only a non-Islamic innovation without any Islamic basis, but further, an intrusion of foreign local cultures into Islam that is immune to or above the Shari'a.

This polemical presentation of non-Islamic Sufism proclaimed by Islamists not only mirrors but also reinforces the orientalist's foreign origin thesis. From this similarity of the two anti-Sufi discourses, a number of studies have noted a methodological feature commonly resident in both ideas. Just as the orientalist do, the Islamists focus on secondary or even exaggerated manifestations of Sufism, as expressed by such representative names as 'corrupted Sufis,' 'false Sufis,' 'heterodox Sufis,' 'idiotic and mad saints,' or at best 'Sufis of intoxication.'<sup>26</sup> Based upon these sorts of Sufism, the

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<sup>25</sup> For a detailed analysis of these Islamists' view on Sufism, see, Sirriyeh, *Sufis and Anti-Sufis*, 65-167.

<sup>26</sup> It is noteworthy that these sorts of Sufis have been blamed from both outside of and within Sufism. While the Islamists have exemplified these Sufis for the total rejection of Sufism, many Sufis such as Ruzbihan Baqli (d. 1209), al-Ghazali (d. 1111) and Ahmad Ibn Idris (d. 1837) have criticized them as a distortion of 'true Sufism.'

studies proceed to argue, the whole of Sufism has been treated and condemned monolithically. Significantly to note, however, recent studies point out that many of the anti Sufi Islamists such as Afgani, Abduh and Mawdudi did not reject Sufism *in toto*, being rather concerned only with corrupted forms of popular Sufism in their days.<sup>27</sup> Rather, they were influenced by the Sufi environment, and accepted certain forms of Sufism which do not contradict the teachings of the Qur'an, the Sunna and *al-salaf al-salih* (the pious forefathers).<sup>28</sup> By their anti-Sufi attitude, what the Islamists were mostly concerned with was a dangerous situation of *bid'a* that people might easily fall into by blindly following Sufi practices at face value even when they conflict the Qu'ran and the Sunna.<sup>29</sup> Underlying this aspect, the scholars have reassessed the idea of the Islamists' total rejection of Sufism.<sup>30</sup> Nevertheless, it is still undeniable that intertwining with a

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<sup>27</sup> In *Taste of Modernity: Sufism, Salafiyya, and Arabism in Late Ottoman Damascus* (Leiden, 2001, 273-304), Itzhak Weismann pictures the Salafiyya in the Arab world as being committed to Sufi revivalist ideas and not rejecting Sufism as such. On the other hand, Sirriyeh (*Sufis and Anti-Sufis*, 24) stresses the social context of the Wahhabi anti-Sufi movement as "where only the most corrupt forms of popular Sufi practice were seen to be present." If the context showed "a higher level of Sufism," the author concludes, the Wahhabi movement might have shown positive attitudes toward Sufism. Abu al-Ala Mawdudi, the preeminent Muslim modernist theorist, represents this voice by taking Sufism as the spirit of *fiqh* (the apparent and the observable conduct), yet, he rejects Sufis who "polluted the pure spring of Islamic *Tasawwuf* with absurdities that could not be justified by any stretch of imagination on the basis of the Qur'an and the Hadith," and "who thought and proclaimed themselves immune to and above the requirements of the *Shari'ah*"; Abu al-Ala Mawdudi *Towards Understanding Islam* (London: Islamic Mission, 1980), 105.

<sup>28</sup> Sirriyeh (*Sufis and Anti-Sufis*, 98) describes this sort of Sufism as "Salafi Sufism." Henri Lauziere's "Post-Islamism and the Religious Discourse of 'Abd al-Salam Yasin,'" (*International Journal of Middle East Studies* 37: 2 (2005), 241–261) features Abd al-Salam Yasin, a Moroccan religious leader and the founder of the movement of "Justice and Social Welfare," who has advocated Salafi Sufism as a Sharia-abiding mysticism, opposite to 'philosophical Sufism' that has its root in foreign ideas like neo-Platonism as represented by al-Hallaj and Ibn Arabi.

<sup>29</sup> Sirriyeh, *Sufis and Anti-Sufis*, 98.

<sup>30</sup> Along with this total rejection of Sufism on the basis of some secondary forms, whether all or only specific Sufi practices should be abandoned has also occupied a scholarly note. For this issue, see, Julia Day Howell, "Sufism and the Indonesian Islamic Revival," *Journal of Asian Studies* 60:3 (2001), 701-729.

broad context of both internal and external politics, the Islamists' desire to rid non-Islamic Sufism of unacceptable accretions has furnished grounds for condemning Sufism *in toto*.

## 1.2. Islamic Sufism

Contrary to the orientalist's and the Islamists' claim about the non-Islamic origin of Sufism, a significant number of scholars have pictured Sufism as an essentially Islamic phenomenon.<sup>31</sup> Grounding themselves in original Sufi writings, some of early modern scholars argued that Sufism bases its doctrine and practice on the Qur'an and the Sunna of the Prophet, which are often called the twin foundations of Sufism.<sup>32</sup> Later studies have advanced this thesis of the Islamic origin of Sufism with details specified for the relations of Sufism to the Qur'an, the Sunna and the Shari'a.

Above all, it is argued that the Qur'anic verses have formed the cornerstone for all mystical doctrines.<sup>33</sup> For this, some scholars have exemplified the verse of the primordial

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<sup>31</sup> The Islamic origin of Sufism has been proposed prominently by numerous scholars such as Louis Massignon, Reynold Nicholson, Arthur Arberry, Henry Cobin, Annemarie Schimmel, Frithjof Schuon, Titus Burckhardt, Martin Lings, and Seyyed Hossein Nasr.

<sup>32</sup> For instance, Arberry (*An Introduction*, 2) emphasizes that "without the twin foundations of the Qur'an and the Hadith, the whole vast and beautiful structure of Islamic mysticism could neither have been erected nor preserved." By the same token, Sahl Ibn Abdullah al-Tustari's (d. 896) saying "all ecstasy (for Sufis) is vain if it is not witnessed by the Qur'an and the Prophetic example" has been widely circulated in the scholarship.

<sup>33</sup> See, Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions*, 12-26, Martin Lings, *What is Sufism?* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1975), 25-32, Michael Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism*, (New York: Paulist Press, 1996), 75-96, and Abu Bakr Siraj ed-Din, "The Nature and Origin of Sufism," in *Islamic Spirituality: Foundations*, ed. Seyyed Hossein Nasr (New York: Crossroad, 1987), 223-238. For more specific examination, see, Massignon's *Essay on the Origins of the Technical Language of Islamic Mysticism*. In this work on the technical vocabulary of the Sufis, Massignon rejects the foreign origin thesis and



covenant (*mithaq*) that had been a foundation of the expression of mystical union among the early Sufis like Junayd al-Baghdadi (d. 910), whose idea of perfect *tawhid* was based upon the verse.<sup>34</sup> Others have demonstrated that the centrality of mystical psychology in Sufism takes its origin from the Qur’anic term *nafs*, the lower soul or the base instinct against which Sufis struggle.<sup>35</sup> The existence of Sufi practices such as *dhikr* (remembrance of God) that stemmed from the Qur’an and the tradition of Sufi commentaries upon the Qur’an (*tafsir*)<sup>36</sup> are also counted relevant evidence on this point.

Concerning the exemplary role of the Prophet in Sufism, studies have demonstrated that, for almost all Sufi authorities, Hadith, which is a corpus of the sayings, deeds and approvals of the Prophet, has been a principal touchstone of their thoughts and

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concludes that “the Qur’an, through constant recitation, meditation, and practice, is the source of Islamic mysticism, at its beginning and throughout its growth.” (73). Mir Valiuddin’s *The Qur’anic Sufism* (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1977) also notes the Qur’anic roots of the practices and doctrines of Sufism.

<sup>34</sup> Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions*, 58. Here, the primordial covenant refers to the Qur’an 7:172, in which God calls forth, from the children of Adam, their seed – that is, all potential souls – and asks “Am I not your Lord? (*alastu bi-rabbikum*),” they say “Yes, we witness it (*bala shahdina*).”

<sup>35</sup> The Qur’anic expression *an-nafs al-ammara bi’s su*, the soul commanding to evil, forms the sharing point for the Sufi psychology of purification. In particular, referring to the struggle with one’s own *nafs*, a concept of *jihad al-nafs* had been circulated and further developed along with a well-known notion of *al-jihad al-akbar* (the greater struggle) in contrast to *al-jihad al-asghar* (the lesser struggle); see, *ibid*, 112-114. Among many Sufi authors who have conceptualized *jihad al-nafs* are al-Hakim al-Tirmidhi (d. 932) and al-Ghazali (d. 1111), whose ideas inspired many later works on the concept.

<sup>36</sup> For an insightful introduction to Sufi *tafsir*, see, Mahmoud Ayoub, *The Qur’an and Its Interpreters*, Vol. 1 (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press, 1984), 1-40. Put simply, as a consequence of the significance of the Qur’an to Sufism, Sufi authors, from the beginning of their mystical tradition upward, have been continuously preoccupied with the production of commentaries on the Qur’an. Yet, in contrast to the popularly known *tafsir* that is understood as the ordinary and exoteric commentary, Sufis have developed their unique exegetical tradition, which is often called *tawil* or esoteric commentary. This Sufi *tawil* is distinctive for its exegetical method, which attempts to go beyond the apparent meaning (*zahir*) of the Qur’anic text in order to derive deeper, hidden meanings (*batin*) through intuitive perception. Jafar al-Sadiq, Sulami, Qushayri, Ruzbihan Baqli are considered the most important early commentaries in this genre. From this initiative onward, Sufi authorities have been continually engaged in commentary in a way relating their thoughts and practices to the Qur’an.

practices.<sup>37</sup> Among many examples quoted by Sufis and used in this scholarship is the famous hadith of *al-Isra wa al-Miraj* (the Night Journey and Ascension) that led many Sufis to write diverse commentaries and writings on the Prophet's ascension, as well as on their own experiences of ascension.<sup>38</sup> Such hadiths as 'the first thing that God created was my light, which originated from His light' and 'I was a prophet when Adam was between spirit and body' also open the way to the concept of the Muhammadan Light.<sup>39</sup> Furthermore, Sufi usage of *Hadith Qudsi* - Hadith whose *isnads* (the chains of transmitters) go back not to the Prophet but to God himself - has been noticed for the thesis that Sufism traces its origin to the Prophet. One of the most famous *Hadith Qudsi* is the *hadith an-nawafil*, in which God promises his loving servant to become the eye through which he sees and the ear through which he hears. As Annemarie Schimmel signifies, this hadith forms one of the primary sources of mystical teaching in Sufism.<sup>40</sup> The concept of *silsila* (the spiritual chain of Sufism), which, being of cardinal importance

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<sup>37</sup> See, Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions*, 26-41, Lings, *What is Sufism?*, 33-44, and Ernst, *Teachings of Sufism*, 15-39. As a case study, see, Schimmel, *And Muhammad is His Messenger: The Veneration of the Prophet in Islamic Piety* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985); and Valerie J. Hoffman portrays the primary role of the Prophet in local Sufi's practical life; Valerie J. Hoffman, "Devotion to the Prophet and His Family in Egyptian Sufism," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 24, 4 (November 1992), 615-637.

<sup>38</sup> Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions*, 27; and Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism*, p. 47. As both scholars exemplify, the Persian Sufi Bayazid Bistami, taking insight from the hadith, describes his flight to heaven in the form of a bird, who then settles on the celestial tree in Paradise and consumes its fruit; he is then transformed with divine knowledge and engages in intimate conversations with God. For mystics such as Ruzbihan Baqli and Ibn Arabi, the motif of ascension is also a key to the extensive visions recorded in their teachings.

<sup>39</sup> Gerhard Bowering illustrates the deep involvement of the doctrine of the Muhammadan Light in At-Tustari's thoughts; Bowering, *The Mystical Vision of Existence in Classical Islam: the Qur'anic Hermeneutics of the Sufi Sahl At-Tustari (d. 283/896)* (Berlin, New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1980), 147-149.

<sup>40</sup> Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions*, 43.

for the authority of Sufi orders, reaches back to the Prophet, has been utilized as an indication of the place of the Prophet in Sufism.<sup>41</sup>

The relationship between Sufism and the Shari'a has also received scholarly notice.<sup>42</sup> In a way summarizing the complex history of the relationship, a recent study underlines that although there have been numerous Sufi poets and fables that challenge the authority of the Shari'a, most Sufis, representatively al-Ghazali, emphasize that the Shari'a is essentially prerequisite to the spiritual growth for gnosis and union.<sup>43</sup> This positive relationship is well epitomized by the Sufi concept of the *Haqiqah*, which literally denotes 'Reality' or 'Truth' and has been technically utilized as 'the inner dimension' with regard to the Shari'a, the 'outer manifestation' of Islam. In fact, there have been not a few Sufis, who overemphasize the *Haqiqah* at the expense of the Shari'a, which

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<sup>41</sup> Victor Danner puts an emphasis on the practice of *silsila* for the Islamic origin of Sufism, arguing that "The *silsila* really indicates that the ultimate origin and the root of the path (*tariqah*) is to be found in the Divinity, who revealed it to the Messenger through the archangel of Revelation, Gabriel"; Danner, "The Early Development of Sufism" in *Islamic Spirituality: Foundations*, ed. Seyyed Hossein Nasr (New York: Crossroad, 1987), 239.

<sup>42</sup> In his *Sufi Essays* (London, 1972), Seyyed Hossein Nasr, repeatedly stresses that there is no Sufism without the *Shari'a*. Some recent studies give detailed focuses on the relationship of Sufism and the *Shari'a*. Bernd Radtke traces the intrinsic relationship between Sufism and the *Shari'a* by examining al-Hakim al-Tirmidhi, whose view had influenced al-Ghazali's decisive thought of Sufism within the *Shari'a*; Radtke, "Ijtihad and Neo-Sufism" *Asiatische Studien* 48 (1994), 909-921. Michel Chodkiewicz demonstrates that Ibn Arabi (d. 1240) grounded his thought in the Qur'an and the *Shari'a*, contrary to the Islamists' accusation against him as a heretic for identifying God and nullifying the *Shari'a*; Michel Chodkiewicz, *An Ocean without Shore: Ibn Arabi, the Book, and the Law* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993). Also, Abdul Haq Ansari, *Sufism and Shari'ah: A Study of Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindi's Effort to Reform Sufism* (Leicester, UK: The Islamic Foundation, 1986) deserves to be noted for the place of the *Shari'a* from the perspective of Ahmad Sirhindi, the great seventeenth century Naqshbandi Sufi shaykh and reformer.

<sup>43</sup> Peter Awn, "Classical Sufi Approaches to Scripture," in *Mysticism and Sacred Scripture*, ed. Steven T. Katz (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 138-152. In this fine work on the intrinsic relationship of Sufism with the Qur'an, Hadith and the *Shari'a*, Awn counts Husayn ibn Mansur al-Hallaj (d. 922), Abu Said ibn Abil al-Khayr (d. 1049) and Abdullah Ansari (d. 1089) as typical figures for overemphasizing Sufism to the *Shari'a*.

subsequently caused the orthodox rejection of Sufism.<sup>44</sup> However, the works of many Sufi authorities such as Abu Nasr as-Sarraj (d. 988), Abu al-Qasim al-Qushayri (d. 1072) and Ali ibn Uthman al-Hujwiri (d. 1076) advocated the inseparability of the *Haqiqa* from the Shari'a. To them, it is the Shari'a that makes possible the way to reach the *Haqiqa*.<sup>45</sup> This relation is further advanced by another Sufi concept of threefold *tasawwuf*, i.e., Shari'a, Tariqa and Haqiqa. As indicated in this order, the Shari'a is the prerequisite way for the Tariqa and further for the haqiqa.<sup>46</sup>

As presented so far, the three groups, European orientalist, Muslim Islamists and Sufi authorities, propose quite different conceptions of Sufism. As many specialists have pointed out, this discrepancy has resulted in a fair degree of ambiguity in defining Sufism.<sup>47</sup> This intrinsic ambiguity has continued into today's academia, in which scholars

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<sup>44</sup> Fazlur Rahman, *Islam*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 143; he describes the Shari'a in this Sufi trend as "the ladder to be climbed and then discarded." Abdul Haq Ansari's examination on Ahmad Sirhindi (*Sufism and Shari'ah*, 76-77) supports this view by noting the existence of such Sufis at Sirhindi's time as "those who have known the truth do not need it (the Shari'a) any longer." Indeed, around the dichotomous conceptualization of the inner and the outer aspects of Islam occurred the controversy between a stern and exclusivist legalism and an excessively emotional religiosity, and this trend would later become a basis of the fundamentalist opposition to Sufism, on the one hand, and marginalized non-traditional Sufism, on the other. Mark Woodward's *Islam in Java* (Tucson, 1989) examines this controversy and the consequent conflict in a local context of Indonesia.

<sup>45</sup> For instance, Al-Qushayri asserts "The Shari'a is concerned with the observance of the outward manifestations of religion; while the Haqiqah (Reality) concerns inward vision of divine power. Every rite not informed by the spirit of Reality is valueless, and every spirit of Reality not restrained by the Law is incomplete." *Ar-Risalat al-Qushairiyya*, Cairo edn., A. H., 1319, 43; cited from Spencer Trimingham, *The Sufi Orders in Islam* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 142.

<sup>46</sup> Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions*, 98-99. As she notes, this threefold *tasawwuf* is related to a tradition attributed to the Prophet, which states "the *shari'a* are my words (*aqwali*), the *tariqa* are my actions (*amali*), and the *haqiqa* are my interior states (*ahwali*)." The relationship of the threefold *tasawwuf* was developed in the Sufi circle as represented by Ahmad Sirhindi's assertion that "the Sufi tariqah and haqiqah are subservient to the Shari'ah"; cited from Ansari, *Sufism and Shari'ah*, 221.

<sup>47</sup> See, Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism*, 1-4 and Carl Ernst, "Between Orientalism and Fundamentalism: Problematizing the Teaching of Sufism," in *Teaching Islam*, ed. Brannon Wheeler (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 108-23.

face fundamental problems in understanding Sufism such as where to place Sufism between those different conceptions, even how to discern who is Sufi or not, or to which degree a specific form of Sufism deserves to be labeled the name of Sufism.<sup>48</sup>

### 1.3. Sufism Moribund vs. Resurgent

Regardless of the problem in the definition, the consequent discourse has tended to focus on the decline of Sufism. Having been greatly inspired by the secularization paradigm of the incompatibility of religion with modernization,<sup>49</sup> a group of scholars has proclaimed the inevitable end of Sufism, at least as embodied in the Sufi orders, in the modern era. As one of the widely held assumptions about the impact of modernity on Islam and Muslim societies, this view reflects the modern social enquiry that mystical religious experience and the rationalism of modernity are incompatible. Such scholars as Arthur Arberry, Clifford Geertz and Ernest Gellner observed and predicted that Sufism and its manifestations as the Sufi orders were and would be fading away, only remaining among the most backward and rural parts of society.<sup>50</sup> To them, the transformation from the classical styles of Sufism based on rural miracle-working saints and mystics to the

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<sup>48</sup> For this intrinsic problem, see, Ernst, *The Shambala Guide to Sufism*, 1-31 and Chittick, "Sufism: Sufi Thought and Practice," 102-109.

<sup>49</sup> That is the secularization paradigm as a belief that with the advent of modern industrial society, religion would gradually fade in importance, then disappear and finally die out. Many sociologists like Byran Wilson and Peter Berger have held this secularization theory based upon the functional-rationalist argument.

<sup>50</sup> Arthur Arberry, *Sufism: an Account of the Mystics of Islam* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1956), Ch. IX, and especially 122, 133; Clifford Geertz, *The Religion of Java* (Glencoe, IL: Free Press, 1960), 182-184; Ernest Gellner, *Muslim Society* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 56ff, and *Postmodernism, Reason and Religion* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992).

scripturalist intellectuals in the urban sphere is inevitable. On this basis, Geertz and Gellner predicted Sufism moribund,<sup>51</sup> and this prediction has continually exerted its influence on later studies on Muslim societies. The most notable study in this line is Michael Gilson's work on an Egyptian Sufi order. From the perspective of Weberian rationalization and Durkheimian functionalism, Gilson argued that most Sufi orders failed to satisfy the new kind of rational inquiry imposed by the middle class urban intellectual, and that the specialized modern institutions like trade unions, political associations and schools substituted for various social, economic and educational roles that Sufi orders prominently had played.<sup>52</sup>

As predicted in this scholarly discourse, the decline of Sufism in the process of modernization and secularization had occurred in the most part of Muslim societies. Upon the infiltration of secularist ideas and the consequent social change, the otherworldly and mystical aspects of Sufism had been constantly fading.<sup>53</sup> In particular, Sufism of exaggerated fatalism, passivity, superstition and ecstatic intoxication, which had long been the target of both of its opponents and other Sufis' accusation, became synonymous with 'the decay of Sufism.'<sup>54</sup> However, as recent studies have indicated, it must be noted that the decline happened not directly due to the proposed 'intrinsic/natural incompatibility of Sufism with modernization' but primarily as a result of the political

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<sup>51</sup> Martin van Bruinessen and Julia Day Howell, *Sufism and the 'Modern' in Islam*, eds. Martin van Bruinessen and Julia Day Howell (London: I.B. Tauris, 2007), 8.

<sup>52</sup> Michael Gilson, "Some factors in the decline of Sufi orders in Modern Egypt," *The Muslim World* 57 (1967), 11-18, and *Saint and Sufi in Modern Egypt: an Essay in the Sociology of Religion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), 188-207.

<sup>53</sup> Trimingham, *The Sufi Orders in Islam*, 249-50.

<sup>54</sup> See, Arberry, *Sufism*, Ch XI "The Decay of Sufism."

relationship between Sufis and their Islamist counterparts. Truly, arguing for the incompatibility of *taqlid* or blind obedience in the Sufi tradition with the scientific reasoning of *ijtihad*, Islamists like Afghani and Abduh calimed that popular Sufism was incompatible with the reason and science that are intrinsic to Islam.<sup>55</sup> In this regard, they proceeded to accuse Sufism of being the origin of Islamic decline in the face of modernity, and as such, advocated the eradication of Sufism. Over the course of the twentieth century, this idea gained popularity, fostering negative images of and effects on Sufism throughout Muslim societies. It was in this social context and not directly because of the proclaimed incompatibility, that the decline of Sufism as a whole, not as a specific form of Sufism, was effectively actualized.<sup>56</sup> This social context has further stiffened with domestic power politics. On the one hand, the Islamists have brought their anti-Sufi attitude into the state policy with the postulating agenda of the ‘Islamic State’ of *al-hakimiyyah* (total absolute sovereignty). On the other, secularist states have opposed Sufism, presenting it as a major cause of state stagnation and considering it a competing political force.<sup>57</sup> In its course, the phenomenal growth of political anti-Sufism has

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<sup>55</sup> Sirriyeh, *Sufis and Anti-Sufis*, 72 and 94.

<sup>56</sup> Julia Day Howell’s empirical work of Indonesian Sufism supports this view by depicting the framing context that the negative “image problems” had exercised in causing the decline of Sufism; Howell, “Sufism and the Indonesian Islamic Revival,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 60, 3 (2001), 701-729. Valerie Hoffman relates the decline to the misunderstanding of Sufism as ‘extremism’; Hoffman, *Sufism, Mystics, and Saints in Modern Egypt* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1995).

<sup>57</sup> Trimingham (*The Sufi Orders in Islam*, 247-250) notes the dual attacks of Islamists and secular authorities against Sufism. However, he argues that the decline of Sufi orders has not come through these attacks, but occurred due to “the changing outlook” in the general process of secularization. To some extent, I concur with this argument. Yet, insofar as it implicitly echoes the intrinsic incompatibility of Sufism with secularization as Gilsean has also proclaimed, I read the argument as a rigid view of ‘homogenous Sufism,’ which appears contrary to ‘dynamic manifestations’ of Sufism. Some recent specialists, in fact, have remarked the role of state in the destiny of Sufi orders in both decline and resurgence; see, for an exemplary study, Valerie Hoffman, *Sufism, Mystics, and Saints in Modern Egypt*.

culminated in shaking the social roots of Sufism *in toto* in many Muslim countries like Saudi Arabia, the Soviet Union, Egypt, and Turkey. Perhaps the most prominent case is the Kemalist Republic in modern Turkey, whose ideology of secular nationalism did not tolerate Sufism and led to a total ban on dervish orders in 1925.

However, against the backdrop of the scholarly prediction of the decline and disappearance of Sufism and the political contribution to it, by the end of the twentieth century, it became clear that Sufism and Sufi orders still remain an important basis of popular devotional life of the Muslim world.<sup>58</sup> Sufism has not only remained influential in traditional rural areas but also expanded among modernized urban intellectual elites within the Muslim world as well as non-Muslim Western societies. This fact has led many scholars to examine the resurgence of Sufism and to reassess its nature and role, deconstructing the professed decline theory, pointing out its crucial flaws and revealing reasons for the unexpected resurgence.<sup>59</sup> The decline theory is defective, above all, in its consideration of Sufism as only rural, ecstatic, illiterate variants of Sufism, while discarding the existing intellectual urban Sufism that has never lost its influence in the history of Sufism. To view Sufism merely as a dichotomy between ‘popular rural

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<sup>58</sup> The resurgence of Sufism has been observed in virtually all parts of the Muslim societies. Among numerous studies on this ubiquitous phenomenon, see, Howell, “Sufism and the Indonesian Islamic Revival,” Leonard Lewisohn, “An Introduction to the History of Modern Persian Sufism,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental & African Studies* 62: 1 (1999), 36-59, and Alexander Knysh, “The Tariqa on a Landcruiser: The Resurgence of Sufism in Yemen” *Middle East Journal* 55:3 (2001), 399-414. All these studies offer insightful interpretations of the contemporary resurgence of Sufism. It is also interesting to read Faiza Saleh Ambah’s “In Saudi Arabia, a Resurgence of Sufism: Mystical Sect of Islam Finds Its Voice in More Tolerant Post-9/11 Era,” *The Washington Post* (Tuesday, May 2, 2006), Page A13.

<sup>59</sup> For instance, Marcia Hermansen portrays how Sufis view the decline theory, arguing that while the European theorists explain the decline in consonance with the context of Muslim stagnation and European rise, Sufis as a representative of Shah Wali Allah understand the development of Sufi spirituality in a conceptual framework of “perfection history” rather than decline; Hermansen, “Contemplating Sacred History in Late Mughal Sufism: The Case of Shah Wali Allah” in *The Heritage of Sufism*, Vol 3, ed. Leonard Lewisohn (Oxford; Boston, MA: Oneworld, 1999), 319-343.



religiosity' and 'sober urban scripturalism' is untenable, as many Sufis have operated in both domains, seemingly without any perception of a contradiction.<sup>60</sup> In its character, the idea of the dichotomy reflects the lopsided orientalist concept of Sufism that, as noted above, exclusively takes 'drunken' Sufism as the 'real' Sufism. In contrast, Sufi authorities such as Hasan al-Basri (d. 728), Abu al-Qasim Junayd (d. 910), al-Ghazali (d. 1111), Ibn Arabi (d. 1240) and Najm al-Din Razi (d. 1256) put an emphasis on 'sober expression' as the essential component of Sufism. While the intoxicated Sufism (*sukr*) underlines the intimacy with God and considers the Shari'a provisional, sober Sufism refers to the rationality of mystical experience that focuses on an experience within the boundary of the Shari'a and with the distance of God.<sup>61</sup> This sober Sufism that has existed along with the intoxicated bears meaningfulness indicative of diverse expressions of Sufism, whose wide range of characteristics oscillates between the two primary poles of sobriety and intoxication. It is this diversity of Sufism that leaves open the possibility that some manifestations of Sufism, if not all, are still compatible to forms of Weberian rationalization and modernism. A remarkable example can be founded in a reformed

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<sup>60</sup> For instance, Henry Munson criticizes the decline theorists' arbitrary distinction of the dichotomy of popular rural religiosity and sober urban scripturalism, by pointing out that some Sufis such as Shaykh al-Hasan al-Yusi in Geertz' study of *maraboutism* were also representatives of scripturalist Islam; Munson, *Religion and Power in Morocco* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993). Notably, Geertz (*The Religion of Java*) characterizes Sufism as a place of solace for illiterate and old men, while he elsewhere acknowledges the dynamics of Sufism by stating "Sufism, as an historical reality, consists of a series of different and even contradictory experiments"; *Islam Observed: Religious Development in Morocco and Indonesia* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), 48.

<sup>61</sup> Chittick, "Sufism, Sufi Thought and Practice," 106–107. The relation between the drunken and the sober aspects of Sufism is best illustrated by the phrase "see with both eyes" of Ibn Arabi, the grand systematizer of Sufi thought. This phrase underlines the importance of keeping balance between the sobriety and intoxication of Sufism. As well-known, Ghazali also keeps both dimensions, attempting to rationalize mystical practices of Sufism. See, Abu Hamid al-Ghazali, *On Disciplining the Soul and On Breaking the Two Desires*, trans. Timothy Winter (Cambridge, U.K.: Islamic Texts Society, 1995). Chapter 3 will comparably approach to Ghazali and Gülen in terms of mystical experience.

branch of the Shadhiliyya of modern Egypt, which, as studied by Gilsenan, shows its expansion to be in consonance with a form of Weberian rationalization.<sup>62</sup> In this regard, the sober Sufism undermines both the decline theorists' conception of Sufism as narrowly confined to a rural, old and illiterate setting, and the Islamists' rejection of Sufism as intellectual stagnation and backwardness in Islam. Additionally, this raises the pivotal question of some scholars' attribution of the resurgence of Sufism to an anti-modern reaction.<sup>63</sup> Another notable critique against the decline theory comes from the Durkheimian functionalist argument. Opposite to its actual application for the prediction of the moribund Sufism, functionalism may also be effectively adopted to show how some contemporary Sufi orders have expanded themselves as mass movements by serving necessary social functions like education and hospitality in civil societies. A good example is the recent resurgence of the Naqshbandiyya both in Indonesian and Turkey, in both of which it has shown a successful transformation to new institutional forms and active engagement in this-worldly matters.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> See, Gilsenan, *Saint and Sufi in Modern Egypt*.

<sup>63</sup> As a notable example of such scholars, Trimmingham (*The Sufi Orders in Islam*, 257) presents and predicts Sufi orders as a last place of refuge and solace from various anxieties produced by modernization. Yet, "this analysis," as John Voll argues in his forward to *The Sufi Orders in Islam* (xiv), "makes it difficult to recognize the continuing strength of the tariqas in many different parts of the world."

<sup>64</sup> See, for the Indonesian case, Howell, "Sufism and the Indonesian Islamic Revival," and for Turkish case, Şerif Mardin, "The Discussion of the Twentieth Century Movement of Said Nursi" in *Religion and Social Changes in Modern Turkey* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989).

#### 1.4. Neo-Sufism

Probably the most remarkable discourse demonstrating the resurgence of Sufism as opposed to the decline theory is the modern concept of “Neo-Sufism.” Some scholars, such as Hamilton Gibb and Fazlur Rahman have observed that a number of important changes in the nature of Sufism took place in the late eighteenth and the early nineteenth centuries.<sup>65</sup> They note in particular the widespread phenomenon of Sufi-led *jihad* movements appeared in reaction to Western colonial powers and/or the corruption of indigenous rulers. According to them, these movements show a tendency toward a revivalist and reformed Sufism of a more Shari’a-minded and less ecstatic nature. This tendency has been subsequently described by the newly-coined term “Neo-Sufism,” underlying its ‘new’ characteristics that differ markedly from the existing Sufi orders.<sup>66</sup> The common characteristics of neo-Sufism in scholarly consensus are, first, its strict enforcement of the Shari’a including the rejecting popular ecstatic Sufi practices, especially with regard to the various forms of saint veneration, second, the empowerment of union with the spirit of the Prophet through a general emphasis on Hadith studies and the notion of the “Muhammadan way” (*tariqa Muhammadiyya*), and, third, active involvement in worldly affairs through assertion of the right to exercise *ijtihad* and the will to take political and military forces in defense of Islam.

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<sup>65</sup> Hamilton Gibb, *Mohammedanism* (London: Oxford University Press, 1970, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed.), 116-17; and, Fazlur Rahman, *Islam*, 205-211.

<sup>66</sup> Rahman is assuredly considered an initiator of this term in scholarship. For Rahman’s conceptualization of the term, see, *ibid*, 206.

From this initiative onward, the concept of neo-Sufism has been the subject of scholarly examination and debate. Such scholars as Spencer Trimingham, John Voll and Bradford Martin have concurred with the concept in explaining Sufi revivalism in the nineteenth century and laid an important foundation for later studies that identify the revivalist movements of that period as neo-Sufism.<sup>67</sup> Others prominently O’Fahey and Radtke, however, have raised questions on the meaning and utility of neo-Sufism, especially pointing out the established but problematic prefix ‘neo.’<sup>68</sup> According to these critics, Rahman and others’ thesis that postulates neo-Sufism as an innovative discontinuity with pre-existent Sufism is unproven due to lack of sufficient prerequisite research on the primary sources.<sup>69</sup> Observing a variety of reformed Sufi orders in diverse socio-political contexts, they have argued that the neo-Sufism thesis not only neglects important continuities of some pre-existent Sufi traditions, but worse, oversimplifies and reduces the diverse group of complex Sufi figures to the stereotype of neo-Sufism.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Trimingham, *The Sufi orders in Islam*, 105-7; John Voll, *Islam, Continuity and Change in the Modern World* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press; Longman, 1982), 23-145 and 281-282; Nehemia Levtzion and John Voll (eds.), *Eighteenth-Century Renewal and Reform in Islam*, (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1987), 3-13; Bradford Martin, *Muslim Brotherhoods in Nineteenth Century Africa* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 71-2 and 108.

<sup>68</sup> Rex O’Fahey. *Enigmatic Saint: Ahmad ibn Idris and the Idrisi Tradition* (Evanston, IL.: Northwestern University Press, 1990), 1-9; Bernd Radtke, “Between Projection and Suppression. Some considerations concerning the study of Sufism,” in *Shi’a Islam, Sects and Sufism: Historical Dimensions, Religious Practice and Methodological Considerations*, (ed.) Frederick de Jong (Utrecht: Publications of the M.Th. Houtsma Stichting, 1992), 70-82; O’Fahey and Radtke, “Neo-Sufism reconsidered”, *Der Islam* 70 (1993), 52-87.

<sup>69</sup> See, O’Fahey and Radtke, “Neo-Sufism Reconsidered,” 73. This critical review itemizes the neo-Sufism thesis with nine characteristics and criticizes item by item.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid*, 54-55. On this basis, O’Fahey and Radtke, (*ibid*, 73 and 87) concludes that the term Neo-Sufism should either be demolished or, at best, strictly restricted to certain Sufi orders in specific areas. Recently, Hoffman has added to the critique by arguing that the neo-Sufi practice of union with the Prophet is not innovatively new but significantly linked to medieval Sufism especially Ibn Arabi (d. 1240), Abd al-Karim al-Jili (d. 1408) and Abd al-Aziz al-Dabbagh (d. 1719/20); Valerie Hoffman, “Annihilation in the

Regardless of the details of the debate,<sup>71</sup> the concept of neo-Sufism derives its importance in disclosing changes in Sufism in accordance with changing contexts, as evidenced by the existence of a reformed Sufism in the nineteenth century. This view has been supported by both the proponents and critics of the concept of neo-Sufism, who unanimously underline the broader social and political changes that have necessitated the shift from the local-based and ecstatic-weighted forms of Sufism to urban-centered, Shari'a-oriented, activist, and sober varieties.<sup>72</sup> In light of this, a number of recent studies have further extended the concept to an understanding of the resurgence of Sufism in modern urban environments and its relation to Islamic reformism.<sup>73</sup> Underlying the Sufi resurgence in these studies is the dynamic nature of Sufism, which exists much beyond

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Messenger of God: the development of a Sufi practice," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 31, (1999), 351-369.

<sup>71</sup> Especially the debate around whether the changes are totally new or simply renewal forms, or whether they are involved at the core of the nature of neo-Sufism or just remain in the outer manifestations, is still ongoing.

<sup>72</sup> For example, O'Fahey and Radtke ("Neo-Sufism Reconsidered," 52-87), the foremost critics of the notion of neo-Sufism, did not reject that there were such changes in the Sufi orders. What they reject is the notion of neo-Sufism in the consensus that was neither supported by serious research nor applicable exclusively to the exemplified neo-Sufi orders. Instead of using the term neo-Sufism, yet in order to indicate the changes, O'Fahey (*Enigmatic Saint*, 4) identifies "a new organizational phenomenon," which refers to new orders that appeared as "relatively more centralized and less prone to fission than their predecessors." Sirryeh (*Sufis and Anti-Sufis*, 11-12) also asserts that, without accepting either the total dismissal argument or the total novelty, the concept is still meaningful to understand new directions of Sufism toward this worldly activism, strict adherence to the Shari'a and organized mass movements. A notable recent study in this line is Mark Sedgwick's *The Heirs of Ahmad Ibn Idris: The Spread and Normalization of a Sufi Order, 1799-1996* (unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Bergen, 1998). In this comprehensive examination on Ahmad ibn Idris, who had been a representative Sufi figure for both proponents and critics of neo-Sufism, Sedgwick reassesses the concept of neo-Sufism and demonstrates its meaningfulness despite some serious pitfalls. Alexander Knysh concludes his examination on the validity of the notion of neo-Sufism with a remark on the necessity of studying Sufism within the broader socio-political context; Knysh, "Sufism as an Explanatory Paradigm," *Die Welt des Islams*, 42/2 (2002), 139-173.

<sup>73</sup> See, as a representative study, Julia Howell's "Sufism and the Indonesian Islamic Revival," which attributes the resurgence of Sufism in contemporary Indonesia to its neo-Sufi characteristics.

the category of monolithic Sufism proposed by the orientalist/fundamentalists and its related decline theorists.

### 1.5. Dynamic Sufism

The modern discourse about Sufism that I have briefly analyzed so far substantiates the dynamics of Sufism. The different conceptions in that analysis disclose the diverse manifestations of Sufism in the face of a wide variety of the changing contexts. As noted above, the modern condition of colonialism/modernization had shaped a reformed Sufism typified by its active engagement in social life, and the dual projects of orientalists and Islamists to separate Sufism from Islam has distinguished a Shari'a-minded Sufism. Later, political pressure of state anti-Sufism has been so influential as to make salient an apolitical Sufism in many Muslim societies.<sup>74</sup> These changing manifestations have led many scholars, on the one hand, to profess an ambiguity in defining Sufism that obscures and misleads relevant academic studies, and on the other hand, to deconstruct and object to some definitions including 'Islamic mysticism' that has popularly exercised its role as a litmus test of orthodoxy.<sup>75</sup> However, even this ambiguity and debate, as I read them, are inevitably related to and reveal the dynamics of Sufism. That is to say, due to this aspect of dynamism, any attempt to confine Sufism to one

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<sup>74</sup> See, Sirreyeh, *Sufis and anti-Sufis*, 153-160.

<sup>75</sup> See, for instance, William Chittick, *The Faith and Practice of Islam: Three Thirteenth Century Sufi Texts* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 165-79. John Voll ("Foreword" to *The Sufi Orders in Islam*, vii) decisively argues that "the simple, textbook definition of Sufism as a mystical expression of the Islamic faith obscures the complexities of its nature and role."

specific definition fails to account for its diverse aspects, as best illustrated in the case of orientalist/Islamist and the decline theorists' definitions. Perhaps the most apparent evidence is the resurfacing of Sufism in the contemporary world with its diverse forms and wide range of perspectives and terminologies. This fact not only discredits any monopoly claimed over the term "Sufism," but also proves that the vitality and continuity of Sufism lies in its dynamism, which enables Sufism to cope with a rapidly changing world.

Building on this concept of dynamic Sufism, contemporary scholars have reexamined the nature and role of Sufism in accordance with changing contexts. A series of such re-examinations demonstrates that contemporary conditions play a significant role in forming various types of Sufism. Whether one sees these various types as a revived continuation of classic Sufi characteristics or as a renewed appearance with newer characteristics, the organic relationship of Sufism with diverse contexts as its forming-grounds must not be overlooked. In a way confirming this view, some empirical studies have noted a recent growth of, for instance, a branch of the Naqshbandiyya that represents the revival of some characteristics of conservative Sufism in the contemporary globalizing and mobilizing world.<sup>76</sup> Others have noted the increasing number of non-traditional Sufi movements in the West like those initiated by Inayat Khan (d. 1927) and Idries Shah (d. 1996) that proclaim a universal essence of Sufism independent of the Islamic faith. Although these non-traditional Sufi forms have been criticized as a

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<sup>76</sup> Tayfun Atay, *Bati'da Bir Nakşi Cemaati: Şeyh Nazım Kıbrısı Örneği* [A Naqshi community in the West: A Case of Shaykh Nazım Kıbrısı] (Istanbul: İletisim Yayınları, 1996).

category of 'pseudo Sufism' within Islam,<sup>77</sup> they show nonetheless a durable adaptation to the given Western context. A close examination makes it clear that the proclaimed universal essence is a product of the reinterpretation of Sufism and Islam coping with the Western context, where both negative images of Islam and religious freedom/pluralism are predominant.<sup>78</sup> From this follows the scholarly consensus that the nature and role of Sufism manifests diversely in its intertwining inseparably with ever-changing contexts. Hence, it must be examined in the broader contexts. In this scholarly consensus, it has been proposed to research Sufism in the contemporary contexts of globalization, pluralization, desecularization and post-materialism, all of which transcend modernity, and so go beyond those theories utilized for Sufism in the context of modernity. Consequent studies have produced such nuanced names as "neo-traditional Sufism,"<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Inayat Khan's assertions like "the Sufi sees the truth in every religion" and "Sufism, which is without any religious obligations, regards spirituality as the religion of the heart" have become the foundational philosophy of his movements, *Universal Sufism* and *Sufi Order International*. Idries Shah teaches similar concepts, as he says "Sufism is believed by its followers to be the inner, secret teaching that is concealed within every religion" and "Sufism is the essence of all religions"; Idries Shah, *The Sufis* (New York: Anchor Books, 1964), 25 and 43. In his review of Idries Shah's *The Sufis*, Seyyed Hossein Nasr criticizes this thought as 'a pseudo Sufism,' which overtly divorces Sufism from Islam. He associates a pseudo Sufism with a pseudo-Vedantism and a pseudo-Zen that are already created in the West; Nasr, "The Sufis," *Islamic Studies* Vol. 3 (1964), 531-3. Sutton Elwell describes 'pseudo Sufism' as a modified movement of the classic Sufism for the highly materialistic West; Elwell, "Sufism and Pseudo Sufism," in *Islam in the Modern World*, eds. Denis MacEoin and Ahmed al Sjami (New York: St Martin's Press, 1983), 49-56.

<sup>78</sup> To a certain extent, the proclaimed universal Sufism is well comparable to Stephen Batchelor's description "Buddhism without Beliefs," which has recently gained popularity as a trend of "new Buddhism" in the confrontation with the dynamic cultural context of the West; Batchelor, *Buddhism without Beliefs: A Contemporary Guide to Awakening* (New York: Riverhead Books, 1997).

<sup>79</sup> This is the characterizing term of Matthijs van den Bos for a new current of Sufism toward nation-state orientation in contemporary Iran where Sufism has attained a new societal and religious legitimacy according to the weakened state strictures on Sufism; Matthijs van den Bos, "Elements of Neo-traditional Sufism in Iran," in *Sufism and the 'Modern' in Islam*, eds. Martin van Bruinessen and Julia Day Howell (London: I.B. Tauris, 2007), 61-75.



“Sufism without *tasawwuf*”<sup>80</sup> and “global Sufism.”<sup>81</sup> Although each of these names reflects a somewhat different emphasis, they are mutually inclusive in pointing to the correspondence of Sufism to the modernizing social changes in Muslim communities across the globe, the distinctive characteristics of Sufism that appeal to the contemporary world, and the existence of various types of contemporary Sufism.<sup>82</sup>

Hereto I have foregrounded the theoretical and contextual framework for the examination of Gülen’s Sufism by reviewing the contemporary discourse. Specifically, I have contextualized crucial debates and problems in the study of Sufism, which will be utilized to identify and situate the nature and role of Gülen’s Sufism. At the core of this preliminary analysis lies dynamic Sufism in its various manifestations in intrinsic interaction with wide-ranging social, political and cultural conditions. For my study on Gülen’s Sufism, this is the major premise that clarifies my position, allowing Sufi authorities’ diverse conceptions.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> This term belongs to Itzhak Weismann, who has conceptualized it for indicating and explaining a modern Naqshbandi branch that has relinquished the specific Sufi terminology including even the terms *tasawwuf* and *tariqa* in the face of both the Islamist critique of Sufism and the existing deviant Sufis. Weismann, “Sufi Fundamentalism in India and the Middle East,” in *Sufism and the 'Modern' in Islam*, eds. Martin van Bruinessen and Julia Day Howell. London: I.B. Tauris. 2007), 115-128.

<sup>81</sup> Along with the scholarly-focused topics of globalization, this concept has been proposed by several specialists of contemporary Sufism. Among them, Olay Hammer’s “Sufism for Westerners” in *Sufism in Europe and North America*, ed. David Westerlund (London: Routledge, 2004, 127-143) is noteworthy.

<sup>82</sup> Among recent research, the following two edited studies provide a general picture of contemporary Sufism; Jamal Malik and John Hinnells, eds., *Sufism in the West* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006); Martin van Bruinessen and Julia Day Howell, eds., *Sufism and the 'Modern' in Islam* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2007).

<sup>83</sup> For instance, Reynold Nicholson collects a large list of definitions of Sufism of Sufis themselves, which refutes any claim for one wrapping definition. Nicholson, “A Historical Enquiry Concerning the Origin and Development of Sufism,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1906), 303-348.

In this chapter, I have highlighted dynamic Sufism as an indication that the Sufi manifestations are not homogenous but divergent according to their respective contexts. This premise of dynamic Sufism, in turn, signifies and necessitates the foregrounding analysis of the local and geopolitical/cultural context of Gülen's Sufism. This is particularly significant in terms of the contemporary feature of *glocalization*, in which, as John Voll emphasizes,<sup>84</sup> Sufism takes on its distinctive local forms in its global framework of interaction. Having underlined this significance, I now proceed to analyze Turkish Sufism.

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<sup>84</sup> By the term *glocalization*, John Voll refers to the context that cosmopolitan global elements interact with particular/local identities and traditions. He further suggests that Gülen's idea and thought should be examined by this feature of contemporary context; John Voll, "Fethullah Gülen: Transcending Modernity in the New Islamic Discourse," in *Turkish Islam and the Secular State: The Gülen Movement*, eds. Hakan M. Yavuz, and John L. Esposito (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2003), 240-242.

## CHAPTER 2

### TURKISH SUFISM: ITS CONSTRUCTIONAL FACTORS

This chapter will examine Turkish Sufism. In its broad scope, Turkish Sufism encompasses all socio-cultural arenas of the urban, peasant and nomadic populations of both mediaeval Anatolia and present-day Turkey. It is a vast subject that is impossible to cover in its entirety. It is imperative, therefore, to clarify and narrow scope of my research. By ‘Turkish Sufism’ rather than ‘Sufism in Turkey,’ I refer to three connotations: as a correspondence with dynamic Sufism and ‘Turkish Islam,’ as a whole of historical and cultural manifestation, and as a trace of tasawwuf (Sufism) rather than tariqa (Sufi Orders).

First, as the previous chapter concluded, dynamic Sufism presupposes that local realities shape specific types of Sufism. This conforms with the scholarly term ‘regional religion.’ Scholars of Islamic studies have used this term to indicate the diversity of Muslim societies and to defy any attempts that confine the diversity into ‘a narrowly-defined but umbrella term’ like monolithic Islam. Having observed that Muslims living in different countries (e.g., Saudi Arabia, Iran, Nigeria, Indonesia, the USA) show more differences than commonalities,<sup>85</sup> scholars argue that different periods and geographical frames result in the diverse manifestations of regional Islam. As John Esposito, a

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<sup>85</sup> These diverse manifestations of regional Islam seem to correspond with a qur’anic verse; “O mankind! We created you from a single (pair) of a male and a female, and made you into nations and tribes, that ye may know each other (not that ye may despise (each other)). Verily the most honoured of you in the sight of Allah is (he who is) the most righteous of you. And Allah has full knowledge and is well acquainted (with all things)””; The Qur’an, 49: 13; Extracted from Ali Abdullah Yusuf, *The meaning of the Holy Qur’an* (Beltsville, Md: Amana Publications. 1999).

foremost critic of monolithic Islam, implies by “an imagined monolithic Islam,” the diversity necessitates examining ‘Islam by region’ with respect to local conditions that generate specific versions of Islam.<sup>86</sup> By the same token, the term ‘Turkish Islam’ is widely circulated among both the western and the Turkish scholars of ‘Islam in Turkey.’<sup>87</sup> An extension of such ‘Turkish Islam’ is ‘Turkish Sufism.’ John Voll, Carl Ernst and other specialists use the concept of ‘regional Islam’ as the basis of their examinations of Turkish forms of Sufism. They have further coined the term of glocalization to put local contexts in the forefront of research on Sufism in the face of the worldly ubiquitous process of globalization.<sup>88</sup> An approach from the perspective of glocalization presupposes a localized Sufism that appears by a unique interaction between the universality and the locality. Accordingly, this approach highlights the dynamic aspect of Sufism, rejecting any uniformity of Sufi manifestations. From this

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<sup>86</sup> See, John Esposito, *Islam and Politics* (Syracuse, New York.: Syracuse University Press, 1991).

<sup>87</sup> For a representative study of Turkish Islam, see, W. Cantwell Smith, “Modern Turkey: Islamic Reformation?” *Islamic Culture*, Hyderabad, 25:1 (1952), 155-186. Also, Hakan Yavuz’s recent article “Is there a Turkish Islam? The Emergence of Convergence and Consensus” (*Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, Vol.24, No.2 (2004), 213–232) provides a strong argument for the term “Turkish Islam” in comparison to other Islamic zones. I concur with both the general thesis of Yavuz that the universal principles of Islam are vernacularized in specific time and space, and his particular presentation of Turkish Islam as a unique reproduction of Islam “in everyday life by those who are raised in a Turkish milieu.” Having observed Korean Muslims and lived in several different Muslim countries, I become a strong proponent of this ‘regional Islam,’ and to this extent, I am specifically content with Yavuz’s conclusion about Turkish Islam that “there is no universal model or a single highway to salvation but, instead, there are multiple ways of being and becoming a Muslim.” However, to me, his concept of Turkish Islam characterized from a primarily socio-political perspective resembles many modern Turkish intellectuals in the political instrumentalization of Turkish Islam in favor of Turkish nationalism. Against this approach, I will frame Turkish Islam in a broader dynamic context that necessarily includes (and requires one to look at) apolitical and cultural areas as well.

<sup>88</sup> See, John Voll, “Fethullah Gülen: Transcending Modernity in the New Islamic Discourse”; Carl Ernst, “Sufism, Islam, and Globalization in the Contemporary World: Methodological Reflections on a Changing Field of Study,” in *Islamic Spirituality and the Contemporary World*, ed. Azizan Baharuddin, Kuala Lumpur: Centre for Civilisational Dialogue, University of Malaya, forthcoming (available in Ernst’s website <http://www.unc.edu/%7Ecernst/articles.htm>).

perspective, I will treat Turkish Sufism as distinct from other regional forms of Sufism, focusing on its organic relationship with the Turkish local factors and the global realities. The modern academic discourse presented in the previous chapter will be also utilized in distinguishing Turkish Sufism.

Second, a close look at the academic focus makes it possible to notice a significant shift from individual Sufis to the Sufi orders. While the modern scholars focused more on individual Sufis with their classical texts, a great number of recent studies have flourished in the exploration of the Sufi orders. Viewing the orders as social manifestations of Sufism, these studies successfully demonstrate how the various orders enable Sufism to develop in a given society. Spencer Trimingham's work, *The Sufi Orders in Islam*, published in 1971, is a pioneering study in this field. Trimingham's socio-religious interpretation of the various Sufi orders as an intrinsic and organic part of Islamic social life and structure has turned scholarly attention from personal mysticism to the social institutions of Sufism. This shift has shed new light on "the way in which Sufism influences historical realities."<sup>89</sup> In other words, Sufism with its social orders is a product of its interaction with political, legal, economic and social factors of society. To this extent, one can safely say that "the history of Sufism is thus the history of the Sufi features of Muslim civilizations."<sup>90</sup> Using this framework, I will analyze Turkish Sufism in light of the history of Turkish Sufi features, and identify the specific characteristics that are results of the interaction with the historical and cultural factors of Turkish society.

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<sup>89</sup> Alexandre Papas, "Toward a New History of Sufism: The Turkish Case," *History of Religions*, 46 (2006), 82.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid*, 82.

Taking the socio-religious approach, however, does not mean to exclude examination of personal, mystical and esoteric dimensions of Sufism. Rather, in my opinion, esoteric speculation and tradition lay at the heart of the Sufi orders, making them integrate into the society by providing for social, cultural and spiritual needs. In this regard, I specifically note the concept of “Tasawwuf vs. Tariqa,” which Howell uses to characterize institutional innovations in contemporary Indonesian Sufism.<sup>91</sup> Essentially, tasawwuf encompasses two dimensional experiences, the spiritual dimension as a personal mystical experience, and the communal dimension as a social/shared experience. Being informed from the first, the latter developed into Sufi collective life that later on prominently appeared around lodges (*tekke* in Turkish). As a part of this organized manifestation of Sufism, there further emerged highly institutionalized forms which were inclusively named ‘tariqa,’ the generic term representing institutionalized Sufism.<sup>92</sup> From this perspective, it would be misleading, in the first sense, to equalize or identify tasawwuf with tariqa. As a recent specialist asserts, “Sufism has always been much more than the sum of the fortunes of various orders. Neither location nor organization defines the limits of its reach.”<sup>93</sup> Although tasawwuf was not overlooked in academia, its

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<sup>91</sup> Howell, “Sufism and the Indonesian Islamic Revival,” 718-722.

<sup>92</sup> As popularly held in the scholarship, the Arabic term tasawwuf is a gerund formed from the root *suf*, which appeared as a generic name in the ninth century. Meanwhile, the term tariqa appeared in the writings of early Sufis of the tenth century like al-Junayd (d. 910), al-Hallaj (d. 922) and al-Sarraj (d. 988) as a word that denotes a path or method of spirituality and moral psychology. Later in the twelfth and the thirteenth centuries, tariqa was circulated as a specific term for institutionalized Sufism. In this sense, Frederick De-Jong distinguishes Tariqa as ‘Way’ or the body of teaching and religious practice from tariqa as “hierarchical-organized initiatory associations founded on a mystical conception of Islam”; De Jong, *Turuq and Turuq-linked Institutions in Nineteenth Century Egypt*, (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1978), 1.

<sup>93</sup> Cemal Kafadar, “The New Visibility of Sufism in Turkish Studies and Cultural Life,” in *The Dervish Lodge: Architecture, Art, and Sufism in Ottoman Turkey*, ed. Raymond Lifchez (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 313.

significance has been more and more exempted from the academic focus, especially since Trimingham's initiative and the consequent tendency to give priority to research on tariqas. It seems to me that this trend is closely related to the nature of current socio-religious approaches that look for easily observable/accessible socio-historical objects such as tariqas, rather than the less visible personal experience or spirituality of tasawwuf. Even though tasawwuf principally includes – though it is not identical to - tariqas, this trend has continually produced an image of tariqa as the symbol of Sufism. This leads to an ambiguous and imbalanced dichotomy between Sufism and the Sufi orders in academic research. Against this dichotomous stance, I will demonstrate that Turkish Sufism has long been represented not only by its tariqa forms (dervish orders) but, far more importantly, by its spiritual and cultural heritage of tasawwuf (dervish culture).

Furthermore, it bears repeating that tasawwuf as a culture - albeit differing in degree from region to region - includes both the personal mysticism and the social organized forms. In other words, tasawwuf as a cultural entity can be best understood by utilizing an approach that considers both the personal and social dimensions as equal denominators. Although this approach has received relatively little attention in the academy, I consider it the natural sequence and the next step for the current academic study of Sufism that has flowed from individual Sufis to the Sufi orders. As a notable case, one can observe that the roles of many major Sufi figures who did not have affiliations to certain orders are quite often confined to a limited and refined class. Nor has the relationship of their thoughts to certain cultures been given adequate due, while their individual thoughts have been explored at length. For instance, Yunus Emre (d. 1321), who was not associated with any Sufi orders, has long been represented as a

typical literary figure, while the undeniably tremendous influence of his Sufi personality and work on the Turkish masses - without regard for their tariqa affiliation – has had little examination. Also, Jalal al-Din Rumi (d. 1273), who did not actually found a tariqa, has been almost exclusively related to the *Mawlawi* order, despite his vivid and significant influence on the religious cultural life of Turks. Based on these observations, I intend to analyze the history of Turkish tasawwuf rather than Turkish tariqas. Consequently, I will contend that Turkish Sufism has been shaped not just by its outer forms of tariqas but more prominently by the inner and inherited spirituality of tasawwuf. By substantiating the abstract term of tasawwuf, the impact of major Sufi figures on the collective consciousness and/or unconsciousness of Turkish Sufism and Islam will be highlighted.

Having defined and limited my view of Turkish Sufism with these three connotations, I will now analyze Turkish Sufism focusing on its historical features. Specifically, the three aspects, characterized as ‘a historically embedded dynamic Sufism into the Turkish culture through great Sufi authorities,’ will be clarified by dividing the history into three phases; the formative period, the developmental phase and the contemporary manifestation. This division reflects my contention that a proper understanding of Gülen’s Sufism depends on an appropriate and relevant contextualization of the history. For instance, as it has been, the all-popular tariqa-centric approach to the history would most probably dismiss Gülen’s Sufism with such simplified terms as ‘Sufi-oriented thought’ or ‘pseudo-Sufism.’ I maintain that it is essential to re-orient or deconstruct the history for a thorough understanding of Gülen’s Sufism. For this re-orientation, I will cover from the first confrontation of Turks with Sufism to the contemporary manifestations, going over the limitations imposed by the



popularly designed historical phases coined as Anatolian, Seljuk, and Ottoman Sufism. Using this chronological and characteristic approach, I hope to clarify the reciprocal relationship between Sufism and major social changes, which will further secure a contextual approach to Gülen's Sufism.

## 2.1. The formation of Turkish Sufism (9c – 14c)

Sufism is unanimously identified in the scholarship as a characterizing pole of Turkish Islamic religiosity. Fuat Köprülü (d. 1966), a Turkish scholar famed as the forerunner of Seljuk and Ottoman studies, depicts Turkish history to be the inseparable unity of tasawwuf and Anatolian culture.<sup>94</sup> In fact, a close look at the history testifies that from its first confrontation with Islam in the ninth century to the Turkish Republic of today, Sufism has always occupied an important place in the social, economic, cultural and political life of Turks. The significance of Sufism has never been reduced even despite ongoing conspiracies against Sufism – more specifically against Sufi orders - as the main cause of religious/national division and social corruption, and the consequent various efforts toward its subjugation or elimination. Instead, the Sufi tradition has long acclimated to the culture through its deep interaction with local conditions, creating a unique localized Turkish form of Sufism and contributing to shape Turkish identity.

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<sup>94</sup> Mehmed Fuat Köprülü, Gary Leiser, and Robert Dankoff, *Early Mystics in Turkish Literature* (London: Routledge, 2006). Yavuz, a recent specialist of Turkish Islam, also asserts that “Due to its religious and philosophic approaches combined with a mystical character, Sufi Islam prevented Turkish culture from losing out within the Islamic religion, and provided an opportunity to formulate its own zone of ‘Turkish Islam.’ In other words, by absorbing Islam into Turkish culture the Sufi networks created Turkish Islam”; Yavuz, “Is there a Turkish Islam? The Emergence of Convergence and Consensus,” 218-219

Despite the importance of Sufism, it is by no means easy to pinpoint a range of the formative period of Turkish Sufism. Above all, the first emergence of Sufism among Turks is hard to trace, as Köprülü admits, due to the limited sources.<sup>95</sup> From this limitation, what is common in the current scholarship is two remarks. First, the Turks were accustomed to Sufism since the tenth century. Second, Sufism in the Turkish context neither appeared *ex nihilo* nor remained in its primitive form. It is reasonable, therefore, to begin with the thesis that Sufism permeated the Turkish communities earlier than the tenth century and the centuries of the Turkification and Islamization of Anatolia. This thesis necessitates examining the initial interaction of Sufism with the rich heritage of pre-Islamic Turkish cultures and beliefs.

From this perspective, I identify ‘the formative period’ as a time span that ranges from the ninth century until the fourteenth century. In this period, Sufism emerged among nomadic Turks, spread with the expansion of the Seljuks, underwent transformation into Anatolian Turkish life and finally shaped its initial form as Turkish Sufism by the rise of the Ottoman Empire.

As generally accepted, the ancient Turks were nomads, characterized by continuing migration. Having their ethnic origin associated with the Hun people that first appeared as a bloc of central Asian nomads in the third century B.C., the Turks had kept moving toward the west. In the eighth century, the Turks, then called the Göktürks (the initiators of the official use of ‘Turk’), encountered Islam that had continued its expansion toward the east. Although this incidental encounter caused the Göktürks’

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<sup>95</sup> Mehmed Fuat Köprülü, *Islam in Anatolia After the Turkish Invasion: (prolegomena)*, trans. Gary Leiser (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1993), 9.

resistance against the Muslim invasion, Islam gradually advanced its contact with the Turks.<sup>96</sup> In this context, ‘the Oghuz Turkmen,’ a large and important branch of the migrant Turks, encountered a Muslim majority population in Transoxiana (Syr Darya region) in the ninth century, and began to convert to Islam. From these Oghuz Turks came the Seljuk dynasty, which would soon acquire its dominant areas from Turkistan to Byzantium.<sup>97</sup> With the expansion of the Seljuks, “during the eleventh century, virtually the entire Turkish world did become Islamized and fell under the influence of Islamic civilization.”<sup>98</sup> In particular, the decisive victory of the Seljuks led by the sultan Alp Arslan (d. 1072) against the Byzantines at the battle of Manzikert (1071) gave the Turks control over most of Anatolia. This resulted in the large migration of the Turks toward Anatolia and the consequent Turkification and Islamization of Anatolia.<sup>99</sup> Since then, despite all the outer and inner political turmoil such as the attacks of the Crusaders and the split of Seljuk dynasty, Anatolia was prone to be the permanent home of the migrant Turks and the new center of Turkish civilization. Such a fate of Anatolia was punctuated by the Mongol invasion of Muslim lands in Central Asia and Iran in the thirteenth century. By driving a huge group of refugees westward into Anatolia, the invasion greatly increased the Turkish Muslim population in Anatolia. This played a determinant role in

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<sup>96</sup> Mehmet Fuat Köprülü, *Early Mystics in Turkish Literature*. 4.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid*, 191.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid*, 6.

<sup>99</sup> For a study of the process of Islamization and Turkification in this period, see, Speros Vryonis, *The Decline of Medieval Hellenism in Asia Minor and the Process of Islamization from the Eleventh through the Fifteenth Century*, (Berkeley, University of California Press, 1971). For a study in Turkish, see, Osman Çetin, *Anadoluda İslamiyetin Yayılışı* [The Spread of Islam in Anatolia] (Istanbul: Marifet Yayınları, 1990).

the Islamization of the region by contributing to the conversion of resident people of diverse religious backgrounds.<sup>100</sup> The following two centuries by 1500 witnessed the completion of the Turkified Islamization of Anatolia.<sup>101</sup>

It was in this process of migration and Islamization that Sufism was first introduced to the Turks and later transformed into a Turkish form. During the westward migration, the Turks came into contact with Sufism in Khurasan in the ninth century. In the following century, there appeared a number of Turkish Sufis, who introduced and spread Sufism among both sedentary Turks in cities and nomadic Turks in hinterlands. From this beginning, Sufism slowly gained strength and popularity among the Turks. The dervishes or *kam/bakhshi* (ancient Turkish terms used for shamans), who personified both the new religion of Islam and the old tradition of shamanism,<sup>102</sup> were respected with honorific titles such as *baba* and *ata*.<sup>103</sup> These babas and atas became the primary agents of Islamization in Central Asia among the Turks by proffering Sufism in their own

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid, 80-85.

<sup>101</sup> V. L. Menage, "The Islamization of Anatolia," in *Conversion to Islam*, ed. Nehemia Levtzion (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1979), 54.

<sup>102</sup> In many scholars' note, *Bakhshi* refers to the Buddhist holy man. Although there is a scholarly dispute over the etymology of the word, it has been circulated as one deriving from the Sanskrit word *bhikshu*. In this context, the term confirms the influence of Buddhism on Turkish religiosity. On the other hand, the term has also been used for shamanist Turks and later for wandering minstrel, as Köprülü utilizes it for his thesis. For a general idea of the word *Bakhshi*, see Emel Esin, "The Turkish Baksi and the painter Muhammad Siyah Kalam," *Acta Orientalia* 32 (1970), 81-114. To me, since both Turkish and Korean belong to the Ural Altai language group, *Bakhshi* may be related to an ancient Korean term *Bakshu*, which denotes 'male shaman.' If I am not mistaken, this relation has not yet been examined by any research.

<sup>103</sup> The literal connotation of both titles is 'father,' which has been used for the respect of an aged man from the earliest days. Yet, in the practical usages in Sufism, the titles denote a man of religious authority. While it referred to a missionary preacher and for a holy man in the early period of Turkish Sufism, later in recent centuries, it has specifically indicated the Bektashi shaykhs.

linguistic and social contexts.<sup>104</sup> Later, along with the Turkic migration, a large number of Sufi dervishes came west to Anatolia to speed up the Islamization process. Specifically, the period from the twelfth to the fourteenth centuries saw the rise of such great Sufis as Ahmad Yasawi (d. 1166), Jalal al-Din al-Rumi (d. 1273),<sup>105</sup> Yunus Emre (d. 1321) and Hajji Bektash Veli (d. 1337), whose tremendous influences in the formation of Turkish Sufism led scholars to call them the founders of Turkish Sufism. Leaving a detailed discussion for these Sufi masters to the later relevant passages, it is sufficient to mention that they not just played a foundational role in the creation of numerous *tekkes*, but also were spiritual authorities who influenced all levels of Anatolian society from the sultans to the masses. Köprülü asserts that thanks to their influential contributions, during the period of the Seljuks, Sufism “became firmly established throughout virtually all the Muslim-Turkish countries and, especially in the large cultured cities.”<sup>106</sup>

This outline of the formative period of Turkish Sufism suffices for depicting the salient trait of the geographical condition. In fact, the geographical context is the most

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<sup>104</sup> Köprülü, *Islam in Anatolia*, 11.

<sup>105</sup> Due to Rumi’s writings in Persian and Arabic and his massive influence in Persian and Indo-Pakistan culture, it is arguable to confine him as one of the founders of Turkish Sufism: on his impact on the Islamic world, see, for instance, A. Banani, R. Hovannisian, and G. Sabagh, eds., *Poetry and Mysticism in Islam: The Heritage of Rumi* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); and, Franklin Lewis, *Rumi: Past and Present, East and West* (Oxford: Oneworld Publications, 2000). Nevertheless, many Turkish scholars such as Köprülü and Ahmet Yaşar Ocak describe Rumi as a cornerstone figure of Turkish Sufism; see, for instance, Ahmet Yaşar Ocak, *Türkiye’de tarihin sapıtılması sürecinde Türk Sûfiliğine bakışlar: Ahmed-i Yesevî, Mevlânâ Celâleddin-i Rûmî, Yunus Emre, Hacı Bektaş-ı Velî (Yaklaşım, yöntem ve yorum denemeleri)* (Istanbul: İletisim, 1996). Though not so much for that degree, Schimmel also considers him as a significant figure in Turkish Sufism, as she signifies Rumi as “a living force in the development of Turkish mysticism, literature and fine arts” along with Yasawi, Emre and Bektashi; see, Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions*, 328. Perhaps more importantly, Rumi’s influence on Turks appears as a phenomenological fact that most contemporary Turks regard and revitalize him as a Turkish cultural/national hero, presenting him to the world as such. As will be detailed in the later parts of this dissertation, this regard has played a significant role in the resurgence of Sufism in contemporary Turkey.

<sup>106</sup> Köprülü, *Early Mystics*, 197.

eminent factor that distinguishes Turkish Islam from forms in other Islamic regions. For this reason, Turkish Islam is described in academia as ‘frontier Islam.’<sup>107</sup> As the term implies, ever since the Turks converted to Islam during their westward migration<sup>108</sup> and settled in Anatolia, Turkey has been a boundary between East and West and between Muslims and non-Muslims. In this frontier condition, the main premise of Turkish Islam was to live, or more correctly, to survive with people of other religions. A symbiotic relationship between Islam and the religions of the Turkic environment (e.g., Shamanism, Buddhism, Christianity) evolved assuring the Turks to develop a culture of peaceful coexistence. In this relationship, Islam has become a melting pot, keeping diverse ethnic groups under one common umbrella.<sup>109</sup> Within the context of the frontier Islam, Sufism was reformulated as a unique Turkish version. Notably, it acted as a dynamic force of the frontier Islam in its tolerant interaction with other religions, and in turn, was exposed to the influences of the various religious cultures.

In its first emergence in the emigrant Turks, Sufism interacted with Shamanism, the then dominant faith of the Turks. The early Turks had traditionally practiced Shamanism from their Central Asian roots. Upon the gradual infiltration of Islam from the ninth century onwards, this shamanistic tradition was neither left behind with the past migration route nor abandoned totally at any historical point. Instead, the Turks combined

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<sup>107</sup> Hakan Yavuz is the most recent and extensive proponent of this term; see Yavuz, *Islamic Political Identity in Turkey* (New York, Oxford University Press, 2003), and “Is There a Turkish Islam?”

<sup>108</sup> In general, the scholars tend to overlook this migration period in their projection of the frontier Islam. Yet, it must be noted that since the very moment of their conversion to Islam, the emigrant Turks had already been in the frontier context between Islam and various religions and so they were to initiate the unique version of frontier Islam. Thus, it is imperative to trace the origin of Turkish frontier Islam back to this migration period.

<sup>109</sup> Yavuz, “Is There a Turkish Islam?,” 221.

it with the new belief of Islam through Sufism, which readily assimilated into the native culture due to its ability to enhance important facets of the old shamanism. Such an arbiter role of Sufism was manifested in the appearance of Sufi babas. Before the Turkic conversion to Islam, their religious cultural life centered on the *ozans*, the shamans who maintained religious sanctity by providing auguries for the tribes and presiding over its collective rites. The influx of Islam did not cause the discarding of this *ozan* tradition, rather, was replaced with a new class of the babas, who inherited, to a great degree, the *ozan*'s religious authority. As an amalgam of Islam and Shamanism, the babas were able to act as cultural mediators between the shamanistic tradition and Islam, transmitting a rudimentary form of Sufism to their tribes and incorporating the native shamanistic tradition into Islamization.<sup>110</sup> In their missionary efforts in the eastern fringe of the Islamic world, the Sufi babas put much more stress on the mystical element, common to both Islam and shamanism, than the differences between the two religions. "This affinity," as Barnes underlines, "facilitated the transformation of allegiance from tribal shaman to Sufi baba (spiritual father), who acted in the capacity of a mystic spiritual elder."<sup>111</sup> Greatly owing to the intermediary role of the babas, 'Islamized Shamanism' appeared as an elementary form of the earliest Turkish Sufism. Later on, this shamanistic Sufi form became more deepened in Anatolia, as the babas played a great role in the

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<sup>110</sup> Köprülü, *Early Mystics*, 8.

<sup>111</sup> John Barnes, "Dervish Orders in the Ottoman Empire," in *The Dervish Lodge: Architecture, Art, and Sufism in Ottoman Turkey*, ed. Raymond Lifchez (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1992), 33.

conversion of both the pagan Turkomans<sup>112</sup> and people of other religious background. The babas propagated Sufism in a simple Turkish that the native Turks could understand. At the same time, they served as a cultural bridge between the newly arrived Turkish speaking Muslims and the remaining Greek speaking Christians. In this way, the Sufi form of the babas represented the then Turkish popular Islam.

The migration to the frontier put Sufism under the influence of not only Shamanism but other religions as well. The local religious cultures such as Indian Buddhist tradition, Iranian Zoroastrian beliefs, Manichaeism, Judaism, Greek philosophy and Christianity affected the Turkish Islamic religiosity in general and Sufism in particular.<sup>113</sup> Perhaps, Christianity had the most profound impact on Sufism since the Turks encountered it long before they entered the milieu of Islamic civilization. This is evidenced by the existence of Christian Turks in Central Asia,<sup>114</sup> who later were located in the frontier between Islam and Christianity. Indeed, many Christian doctrines and practices penetrated into certain Sufi forms, as clearly indicated in the Bektashi order.<sup>115</sup> Likewise, the various religions helped to shape a specific vernacular Turkish form of Sufism. Yet, such blended Sufism did not appear simply as a passive object. Instead, it came about through active internalization of the religions into Turkish Islamic religiosity,

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<sup>112</sup> Türkmen in Turkish spelling, who, according to John Birge, distinguishes from Turks. While the latter referred to elite Turks, the former was used for the mass “who still abode in their primitive barbarianism and adhere to their old way of life”; John Birge, *The Bektashi Order of Dervishes* (London: Luzac, 1965), 31.

<sup>113</sup> For an extensive work on the impact of extra-Islamic influences in the formation of Turkish popular religion, see, Ahmet Yaşar Ocak, *Bektaşî Menakıbnamelerinde İslam Öncesi İnanç Motifleri*, Istanbul: Enderun Kitabevi, 1983.

<sup>114</sup> Birge, *The Bektashi Order of Dervishes*, 31.

<sup>115</sup> For the parallels between Christian and Bektashi practices, see, *ibid*, 215-218.



especially by promoting a symbiotic relationship between Islam and the local religious traditions. Not only the emigrant Sufis that brought a synthesized version of Sufism to Anatolia, but also the Anatolian converts from other religious backgrounds contributed to the articulation of the syncretistic and latitudinarian nature of Turkish Sufism. In addition, the popular preaching style of the early Sufis that stressed the universal aspects of Islam and its close resemblance to other religious beliefs and practices reinforced the syncretistic version of Islam.<sup>116</sup> This eclectic and latitudinarian character facilitated the conversion of pagan Turks, Zoroastrian, Jews and Christians to Islam.<sup>117</sup>

In sum, the inevitable interaction of Sufism with the diverse religions on the frontier zone became a determinant factor in defining the early Turkish Sufism, leading to the development of a synthesized version. It is significant to note that this interaction led to two interrelated consequences: a spirit of tolerance and a non-orthodox Sufism.

The frontier milieu promoted inclusivity and tolerance. Tolerance is one of the major commonalities of almost all forms of regional Sufism. Distinctively, the tolerant feature of Turkish Sufism was not just a result of theological and philosophical speculation, but an outcome of the active adaptation of its geographical location. The frontier context, which urged the Turks to incorporate people from various religious cultures, simultaneously created and spread an inclusive form of Sufism. In the process of

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<sup>116</sup> Barnes, "Dervish Orders in the Ottoman Empire," 34.

<sup>117</sup> Vryonis, *The Decline*, 365; also, see, 358, which notes Badr al-Din's preaching of religious equality as a strong appeal to the Christians.

a “multidimensional harmonization of faiths,”<sup>118</sup> Sufism in this region developed a universal version of Islam, with an emphasis on ‘commonality’ or ‘similarity’ rather than ‘difference’ or ‘discrepancy’ between religions. To a certain extent, this form of Sufism does not require any necessary distinction or discrimination between ‘us’ and ‘others’ to define each other.<sup>119</sup> As many specialists point out, it is this tolerance that enabled Sufis, be they dervish babas or great Sufi masters, to act as cultural mediators between Islam and the other religions, between local and universal versions of Islam, between urban and rural people, and between rulers and subjects. Armed with this inclusive spirit, many Sufis were successful missionaries, who contributed greatly to the Islamization of Anatolia.

Countering this view, one can note the existence of the forcible conversion in Anatolia. As a matter of fact, several western researchers consider the conversion of Anatolia to Islam as a forcible and involuntary conversion that occurred in the hegemony between the Islamic Seljuk and the Byzantine Empire. That is to say, the conversion happened largely due to the decline of church leadership in Anatolia by the militaristic expansion of the Turks and the colonization of Anatolia with the slogan of armed jihad, the holy war. From the Christian perspective, the primary reason for the conversion was the war-bearing, destructive, violent and aggressive character of Anatolian Islam. This

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<sup>118</sup> This phrase belongs to Niyazi Öktem for an indication of an aggregate blend of religious traditions that the faith and theology of Anatolian Muslims is based on. Öktem, “Religion in Turkey,” *Brigham Young University Law Review*, J. Reuben Clark Law School, vol. 2002, no. 2, 371-404.

<sup>119</sup> Yavuz, “Is there a Turkish Islam,” 221-2.

view minimizes, if not completely ignores, the tolerant nature of Turkish Islam.<sup>120</sup> On the contrary, a group of scholars point out that both Muslim and Christian sources do not confirm the forcible conversion as a popular phenomenon in the period at issue. Rather, adducing the hagiographic sources, they contend that the tolerant aspect of Islam, as enhanced by the Sufi teachings of inclusiveness and latitudinarianism, led many Christians to convert to Islam.<sup>121</sup> Although the existence of the forcible conversion can hardly be denied, the latter view takes into account the frontier feature of the early period of Turkish migration. In this period, the Turks were not a majority nor was Islam well established enough to allow dominance over other religions and to force the non-Muslims to embrace Islam. At least in this context, if not in all the history of Anatolian Islam, the peaceful coexistence with people of other religious cultures was necessary for mutual survival, and as a necessary course, tolerance of various religions followed. This contextual understanding makes it reasonable to maintain that the tolerance aspect of

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<sup>120</sup> A representative contemporary study for the argument of the forcible conversion is Speros Vryonis' *The Decline of Medieval Hellenism*, which pictures the twelfth and the thirteenth centuries as a period of enslavement, flight, plague, and famine to the Christian populace that the Turkish conquest and settlement of Anatolia had brought, and on this basis, argues for the forcible and involuntary conversion of Christians.

<sup>121</sup> For a fine summary of the existing debate at issue, see Menage, "The Islamization of Anatolia." As this article reviews, Vryonis (*The Decline*, 365) acknowledges that "the latitudinarian character of dervish religiosity opened the gates of conversion to pagan Turks and Christian alike." However, in the whole picture of Vryonis' analysis of the conversion of Anatolia to Islam, one can soon and readily realize that compared to the predominant context of the forcible conversion, the voluntary conversion based upon the tolerant aspect of Islam was an exceptional and minimal case only confined to the marginalized Sufi dervishes. Contrary to this contention, Birge (*The Bektashi Order*, 28-29) adduces evidence to portray the thirteenth century immediately after the Crusaders as the period of close relationship between Christianity and Islam. This view is recently advanced by a study specialized on dervish lodges. In examining the role of dervish lodges in Central Anatolian cities between the thirteenth and the fourteenth centuries, Ethel Wolper depicts the Sufi lodges as the intermixed socio-religious places of Muslim-Christian harmonious interactions; Wolper, *Cities and Saints: Sufism and the Transformation of Urban Space in Medieval Anatolia* (University Park, PA: Penn State Press, 2003), 78-81.

Islam as promoted by Sufis was a more appealing and effective factor in the conversion than the alleged aggressive and exclusive Islam.

At the same time, the influx of neighboring religious cultures created a seed bed for non-orthodox Sufism. Generally, non-orthodox Sufism refers to heterodox or heretical Sufism with its own characteristics derived from the mixture with other religious traditions in a way of countering to the Islamic doctrines. In the Anatolian frontier context, non-orthodox Sufism emerged as a result of excessive tolerance for other religions. Some early Sufis initiated and advanced an extreme version of Sufism with a heavy intermixture with other religions, while diluting and minimizing Islamic elements. Though extra-Islamic in nature, this blended heterodox Sufism exerted significant influence on Turkish Islam.

The non-orthodox versions of Turkish Sufism dates back to the baba tradition. As noted above, the baba tradition emerged as an aggregated religious trend. The shamans, who acquired a veneer of Islam in Khurasan and blended it with their tradition in the medium of Sufism, became the Sufi babas. They launched their own religious expression, the babai Sufism, paving the way for a further amalgamation of Islam and other religions. As Turkish migration continued and confronted religious diversity, this babai Sufism strengthened. Later in Anatolia, the babas gained significant popularity as indicated by their titles like *abdal*, *shaykh*, *torlak*, *eshik*, *shemsi*, *qalandar*. From this beginning, the babai Sufism represented an Anatolian Sufi trend of ‘diluted Islam by other beliefs’ with the antinomian, non-orthodox and extra-Islamic character. Due to the non-Islamic features, the babai Sufism has long been accused of acting counter to the Shari’a. Nevertheless, insofar as the early history of Turkish Islamization is concerned, it was not

orthodox Islamic figures but the baba Sufis that dominated the spiritual life of Turkish nomads and of the settled peasantry.<sup>122</sup> The tradition of babai Sufism was further enhanced, prominently, by Qalandars and Bektashis.

Qalandars were a group of dervishes, who fled from Central Asia to Anatolia around the thirteenth century with their distinguishing belief and appearance as peripatetic vagabonds.<sup>123</sup> The ostensive factor that differentiated them from other Muslims was their mendicant way of life among villages and towns, carrying visual and musical instruments like flags, flutes, drums and tambourines. To a certain degree, this way of life indicates the influence of the Indian Hindu culture like *sadhus*.<sup>124</sup> But for the theological basis of the lifestyle, the Qalandars relied heavily on the Malamatiyya doctrines.<sup>125</sup> The Malamatiyya (*malama*, as an Arabic word, literally means blame) first emerged independently of and later was absorbed into Sufism under the influence of Buddhist ascetics and Christian mystics. When it spread into Khurasan from Iraq, this mode of religiosity became known with its peculiar practice of incurring blame for nonobservance of the external aspects of Islamic ritual.<sup>126</sup> In some scholars' analyses, this

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<sup>122</sup> Menage, "The Islamization of Anatolia," 60.

<sup>123</sup> Tahsin Yazıcı, "Kalandar," *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, vol. 4 (Leiden, 1978, 2d ed.), 472-73. For an extensive and inspiring study on Qalandars, see, Ahmet Yaşar Ocak, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda Marjinal Sufilik: Kalenderiler* (Ankara: TTK Publications, 1992). For the literary use of the term 'Qalandar,' see, Katherine Pratt Ewing, *Arguing Sainthood: Modernity, Psychoanalysis, and Islam*, (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1997), 230-52.

<sup>124</sup> Ocak, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu'nda*, 6-11.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid*, 7-16.

<sup>126</sup> For a detailed examination of the Malamatiyya in Turkish context, see, Abdülbaki Gölpınarlı, *Melamilik ve Melamiler* (Istanbul: Gri Yayın, 1992; 1<sup>st</sup> ed., 1931). Due to the peculiar appearance like shaving hair and beard, the Qalandars are also considered in the tradition of Buddhist Tantric Bakhshi; see, Esin, Emel, "The Turkish Baksi and the Painter Muhammad Siyah Kalam," 110-111.

movement was an elite trend widespread in Iran, from which the Qalandars emerged as its popular version diluted and simplified by Türkmen babas.<sup>127</sup> As a popularized version, the Qalandars developed their own ways, keeping a slack discipline of the Malamatiyya. They purposefully drew blame upon themselves by doing practices that conflict with the formal Islamic observance and by maintaining alienated behaviors such as the famous ‘four cuttings’ - to shave their hair, beard and eyebrows, and to be indifferent to religious obligations.<sup>128</sup> The Qalandars were indifferent not only to Islamic obligations but also to this-worldly matter, taking no care for the morrow and withdrawing from the world. Consequently, they gave up urban and/or settled life and chose a life of itinerant mendicancy. Finding no meaning in the Sufi movements that had gradually become institutionalized, they developed neither a systemized body of beliefs and rituals nor organizations. Along with the Malamati influence, the Qalandars adopted in their simplified version some excessive Shi’ism and Batinism, which drove them to have, over time, extremist Alevi tendencies.<sup>129</sup> In this way, they became the object of Sunni-orthodox reproach, yet they were still able to gain ground at the lower and illiterate masses. Some major links of this chain were the Haidariyya, the Camiyya and the Nimetullahiyya.<sup>130</sup>

As clear as it was in the case of the Qalandars, the strong tendency towards assimilation with the other religious cultures was the fundamental character of non-

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<sup>127</sup> Taking Köprülü’s view, Ocak advances the distinction between the ‘elite’ Malamatis and the ‘popular’ Qalandars; Ocak, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu’nda*, 62-75.

<sup>128</sup> Köprülü, *Islam in Anatolia*, 12.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid, 13.

<sup>130</sup> Ocak, *Osmanlı İmparatorluğu’nda*, 40-50.

orthodox forms of Sufism. And, it was this character that ensured their successful acculturation and permeation into the frontier context. Such areas, where the non-Islamic and/or non-Sunni Islamic cultures like the traditional Shamanism, Paulician Christianity and extremist Shi'i/batini beliefs were predominant, had once been the seed bed for non-orthodox Sufism. They now became a playground of the non-orthodox Sufi prevalence. In these regions, as the babas with the names like Qalandars and Haidaris spread their aggregated brand of religiosity under the apparent guise of Sufism, their extra-Islamic beliefs and non-Shari'atic practices had a major influence on the Turkish masses, especially those who remained as superficially-Islamized Muslims. It was for the same reason and in the same regions that these non-orthodox Sufis set off a series of clashes against orthodox Sunnite authorities, which have continued until today. Since the emergence of the babas, the religious distance between the non-orthodox Sufism and the orthodox Islam continued to broaden. As the former enlarged its dominance, a tension between the two had grown. At the peak of this tension occurred the first and the most severe clash in the Anatolian history, known as the Babai rebellion (1240), wherein Baba Ishaq and his followers revolted against the Seljuk sultanate.<sup>131</sup> According to Ibn Bibi, the celebrated Seljuk historian, Baba Ishaq was a Turkish holy man who practiced his

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<sup>131</sup> As Wolper (*Cities and Saints*, 10) rightly points out, despite a good amount of sources on the Babai rebellion, there is a disagreement among the scholars on the identity of its leader, for instance, if he was Baba Ishaq or Baba Resul. In my reading, Ahmet Karamustafa's contention that Baba Ishaq was also known as Baba Resul has a persuasive logical sequence; see, Karamustafa, "Early Sufism in Eastern Anatolia," *Classical Persian Sufism: from Its Origins to Rumi*, (London, 1993), 175-198. For this issue over the identity of Baba Ishaq and Baba Resul, see in a comparable way, Köprülü, *Early Mystics*, 200 and note 35, Karamustafa, "Early Sufism," 179-83, and Ahmet Yaşar Ocak, *XIII. yüzyılda Anadolu'da Baba Resûl (Babaîler) isyanı ve Anadolu'nun İslâmlaşması tarihindeki yeri* (Istanbul : Dergâh Yayınları, 1980), 83-89.

gifted magic and its related arts like talismans.<sup>132</sup> Having preached among Turkish tribes, he acquired a large number of followers, Turkmen and Christian alike, in various parts of Anatolia, and became one of the greatest Qalandar babas.<sup>133</sup> Baba Ishaq proclaimed himself as the prophet or the messiah, and thus was revered with the title *Baba Rasul Allah* among his followers.<sup>134</sup> As the dominance of his influence with this belief was growing enough, he excited them to do armed jihad, against the sultan's regime.<sup>135</sup> In the consequent clash, while the followers of Baba Ishak took over several prominent cities of the north eastern Anatolia, their *Baba Rasul Allah* was captured and executed (1240). The revolt was finally quelled by the imperial army summoned from the East, and an extensive massacre of all the supporters including women and children followed. As it was, the revolt was fired as a political clash between the sultan's oppression and Baba Ishak's messianism, and as such, ended in by the political means.<sup>136</sup> Thereafter followed a train of Sufi uprisings, representatively the revolt of Badr al-Din b. Qadi Samawna in the fifteenth century and the Kizilbash revolts in the sixteenth century. In this context, the Baba Ishak revolt acted as an important precursor for later clashes between the heretical and schismatic Sufi movements and the Sunni orthodox Islam.<sup>137</sup> To a certain extent, the

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<sup>132</sup> Karamustafa, "Early Sufism," 180.

<sup>133</sup> See, Köprülü, *Islam in Anatolia*, 14.

<sup>134</sup> Köprülü, *Islam in Anatolia*, 74 and note 48; here, Köprülü refers to a record of Abu'l-Mahasin Ibn Taghri Bardi's (d. 1470) *Al-nujum al-zahira fi muluk Misr w'al-Qahira*, which notes "his supporters cried out 'There is no God and Baba is the messenger of God.'" See also, Ocak, *XIII. yüzyilda*, 104-6.

<sup>135</sup> Köprülü, *Islam in Anatolia*, 14.

<sup>136</sup> Ocak, the leading historian of the revolt, gives many involved reasons for the revolt such as economic and psychological factors. However, he contends that the trigger was quite political, that is, against the oppressive policies of Kaykhustraw II: Ocak, *XIII. yüzyilda*, 59-79.

<sup>137</sup> Köprülü, *Early Mystics*, 200.



modern Kemalist accusation and ban of all Sufi orders can be traced back to this revolt. As such, the babai rebellion left an unparalleled precedent that dramatically changed the contour of Sufism in the Turkish context. It continually made the state aware of a political threat of Sufism, and so, turned the state's amicable relation with Sufis to relations of distinction and discrimination among Sufis. From this beginning, Sufis of the non-orthodox, *batini* and *Shii* affiliation became reminders of the baba revolt and were regarded as a potential threat against the orthodox Sunni state. As an apparent and immediate change after the rebellion, Wolper illustrates how the dervish lodges came to be regarded as the places of political threat to the Seljuks and later rulers since the rebellion.<sup>138</sup>

In spite of the babai revolt and the state retaliation, the non-orthodox Sufi tradition continued to be spread and popularized by other babas. The most prominent and influential figure was Hajji Bektash Veli (d. 1337),<sup>139</sup> whose name became well-known associated with the Bektashi order. Although the historical sources provide conflicting information on his life and thought, it is commonly accepted that Hajji Bektash was an immigrant who fled from Khurasan to Anatolia at some point in the thirteenth century.<sup>140</sup> He had a certain connection with the Baba tradition and the Qalandariyya especially

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<sup>138</sup> Wolper, *Cities and Saints*. In Wolper's examination, since Baba Ishak and his followers used the Sufi lodges as meeting sites, the lodges that had traditionally functioned as religious and travel stations before the rebellion came to be considered much like the places of political dissent and armed uprisings.

<sup>139</sup> The historical documents about the life of Bektash do not provide an accurate account of his death. While 738 A.H/1337 A.D is believed the year of his death among the Bektashis, some documents demonstrate that his death happened before 691/1291. For a detail, see, Karamustafa, "Early Sufism," 187; Birge, *The Bektashi Order*, 35-51.

<sup>140</sup> See, Birge, *The Bektashi Order*, 41-43. This study is still the best discussion of the Bektashiyya.

through Baba Ishak.<sup>141</sup> According to Shams al-Din Ahmad al-Aflaki's *Manaqeb al-arefin*, the earliest available source mentioning Hajji Bektashi and written between 1318 and 1353, he was "the special vicegerent of Baba Rasul."<sup>142</sup> He was not obedient to the Prophet nor did he abide by the Shari'a, as illustrated by a story of his magical power to change the water for his ablution to blood.<sup>143</sup> The *Vilayetname* of Hajji Bektash Veli, the corpus of the Bektashi order that marks the legendary biography of Hajji Bektash, confirms the heterodox behaviors of Bektash as it records his rejection of formal prayers in public.<sup>144</sup> As portrayed in these sources, Bektash maintained markedly non-orthodox and antinomian beliefs and behaviors. He was, nevertheless, a learned Sufi of illuminated interior<sup>145</sup> as evidenced in his conceptualized discussion of 'four gates' (*Dört Kapı*), the Shari'a or 'orthodox Sunni religious law,' the Tariqa or 'teachings and practice of the secret religious order,' the Marifa or 'mystic gnosis,' and the Haqiqa or 'immediate experience of the essence of reality.'<sup>146</sup> This is a direct indication that he was much knowledgeable of Islamic doctrines ranging from the Shari'a to Sufism. In the frontier

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<sup>141</sup> See, *ibid*, 43-4; Köprülü, *Islam in Anatolia*, 15 and 77. For a recent work of the relationship of Bektash and the babas, see Karamustafa, "Early Sufism," 175- 198.

<sup>142</sup> Shams al-Din Ahmad Aflaki, *The Feats of the Knowers of God: Manaqeb Al-Arefin*, trans. John O'Kane (Brill Academic Publishers, 2002), 263. Although another famous source, the *Vilayetname*, gives the converse information by describing Hajji Bektash as the Shaykh of Baba Resul, this does by no means dismiss the relation of the two, providing a significant clue to figure out the identify of Hajji Bektashi.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid*, 263 and 343.

<sup>144</sup> Birge, *The Bektashi Order*, 49.

<sup>145</sup> Aflaki, *The Feats of the Knowers of God*, 263.

<sup>146</sup> For a detailed discussion, see, Birge, *The Bektashi Order*, 102-109. Contrast to an argument that the concept of the four gates confirms Bektash's orthodox-Sunni identity, it seems that Birge implicitly spurned such argument by juxtaposing several counter-evidences derived from the different sources that inclusively indicate the non-orthodox elements of Bektash's thought. See, *ibid*, 33-51.

context of the various religious cultures, Bektash was also exposed to the influence of multi-religious environment. Just as the various religions had impacted the Baba tradition such strongly to bring a new blended religiosity, so did Bektash's Sufism.<sup>147</sup> Bektash had a definite inclination toward Ali, the Twelve Imams and the Shii principles such as “*tevella* and *teberra*, love for those who love the holy family and enmity for those who are its enemies.”<sup>148</sup> He also had a close relationship with Christians as seen in many writings that record a number of Christians as his followers.<sup>149</sup> It was this synthesized Islamic version consisting of Sunni, Shi'i, Christian and other religious practices that Bektash preached in Anatolia. Combined with his reputation for miraculous powers and supernatural deeds,<sup>150</sup> Bektash gradually gathered followers among Turkomen tribes from both Muslim and Christians and was eventually recognized as the leading Saint of the times.<sup>151</sup>

Bektash's thought left a colorfast mark on Turkish Sufism from its formation to its manifestations of today. As much as Rumi was such an influential Sufi, albeit different directions, so was Bektash, a contemporary of Rumi.<sup>152</sup> After all, his Sufi thought, which

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<sup>147</sup> For a detail of the foreign influence, see, Ahmet Yaşar Ocak, *Bektaşî Menakıbnamelerinde İslam Öncesi İnanç Motifleri*, Istanbul: Enderun Kitabevi, 1983. In this extensive work, Ocak articulates the influences, on the formation of the Bektashiyya, of non-Islamic religions such as Buddhism, Manichaeism, Paulicianism and Bogomilism.

<sup>148</sup> Birge, *The Bektashi Order*, 45.

<sup>149</sup> See, Wolper, *Cities*, 79.

<sup>150</sup> The *Vilayetname* is replete with such miraculous stories. For some remarkable miracles of Bektash, see, Birge, *The Bektashi Order*, 33-40.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid*, 50; Birge gives this account as a common picture derived from the existing several sources on Bektash.

<sup>152</sup> There is a good amount of works on the relation of Bektash with Yasawi, Rumi, Yunus Emre, Sarı Saltık and other Sufis. For the most recent critical revision of such relationship, see, Karamustafa,

crystallized the babai Sufism, continued to appeal to the Turkish masses. His legend and lore were already well established within the two centuries after his death, as evidenced by the historical existence of the *Vilayetname* itself. The fact that the earliest sections of the *Vilayetname* date back to around the second half of the fourteenth century<sup>153</sup> indicates that the story of Hajji Bektash's saintliness was in place by that time. The *Vilayetname* further notes heroic disciples of Bektash such as Sarı Saltık, who, with his mystical and miraculous works, played a great role in spreading the Bektashi way as far as the Balkans and Georgia.<sup>154</sup> *Tekkes* were built around the areas where the early Bektashi saints lived and/or acted. The *tekkes* preserved the stories of their miracles, continually impressing local people including Christians and becoming a center of the Anatolian conversion. Primarily due to the energetic missionary efforts of the early Bektashi saints, Bektashism soon spread out over Anatolia and the Balkans. Its popularizing process happened not remotely from but interactively with the local state institutions and the various religious heritages. Since the time of Hajji Bektash, the early Bektashis established a close relationship with foundational state institutions. In relation to the Seljuk state, ironically, they benefited from the state's negative mood following the babai rebellion. Though

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"Origins of Anatolian Sufism," in *Sufism and Sufis in Ottoman Society: Sources, Doctrine, Rituals, Turuq, Architecture, Literature and Fine Arts, Modernism*, ed. Ahmet Yaşar Ocak (Ankara: Turkish Historical Society, 2005), 78-84.

<sup>153</sup> Karamustafa, "Early Sufism," 187-88. Based upon a number of relevant references, Karamustafa concludes that the oldest extant copy of the *Vilayetname* was written at some point between 1481 and 1501.

<sup>154</sup> Although his legendary life differs from sources to sources and the *Vilayetname's* account is very questionable as historical information, the story of Sarı Saltık in the *Vilayetname* carries its significance as it indicates the early missionary activities for the popularization of the Bektashiism. For a fine summary of Sarı Saltık in the *Vilayetname*, see, Bedri Noyan, *Hacı Bektaş Veli Velâyetnamesi* (Istanbul: Can Yayınları. 1996), 47-62.

Bektash had a certain relation with Baba Ishaq, he himself and his followers enjoyed a prestige with the Seljuk sultanate, which, from the lesson of the revolt of Baba Ishaq, attempted to maintain a friendly relationship with Sufis, especially those who had an influential power over some troublesome tribes.<sup>155</sup> Further, according to the *Vilayetname*'s detailed account of Evrenos Ghazi, the Bektashis were very much involved in the formation of the military corps of Janissaries.<sup>156</sup> The Bektashis continued to cooperate with the Janissaries in their campaign of conquest, and became closely associated with the military career of the Ottoman sultanate from the fourteenth century and onward.<sup>157</sup> Through this cooperation, the Bektashis gained state approval for the organization and centralization of their movements, becoming the heirs of the baba tradition.

Out of this milieu came the Bektashi order as an institutionalized form, which took shape from the early fifteenth century about a century and half after the death of its eponymous figurehead, Hajji Bektash Veli.<sup>158</sup> The order emerged as a verified version of the early Bektashi tradition. It furthered the conglomeration with such widely varying heritages as traditional shamanism, Christian Anatolian and non-Sunni doctrines and practices. Thus, from its beginning, the order was decidedly heterodox and extremely

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<sup>155</sup> Vryonis, *The Decline*, 376.

<sup>156</sup> Birge, *The Bektashi Order*, 51-3.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid*, 51.

<sup>158</sup> Köprülü, *Early Mystics*, 104. For the origin of the order, Birge sees differently as he argues that "at least by 1400 the fundamental ideas were already a part of the whole order, widespread among the village groups as well as in the specifically Bektashi organization." Birge, *The Bektashi Order*, 50.

disparate.<sup>159</sup> Similar to the Baba-Qalandari tradition, the Bektashiyya did not keep the religious law and observations, and was considered as the heretic outside of the Shari'a.<sup>160</sup> However, having kept the tradition of the early Bektashis by actively participating in the Janissary corps, the leaders of the order continually provided spiritual guidance to the corps, a strong source of support for the Ottoman for centuries.<sup>161</sup> In this way, the Bektashi order played a role in popularizing Bektashi Sufism among the Turkish masses.

However, it would certainly be misleading, although quite fashionable in academia, to maximize the role of the order in spreading the Bektashism. Rather, it must be stressed that the legacy of Bektash has directly and consistently influenced the religiosity of Turkish masses, independently from the activities of the Bektashiyya. Indeed, because of the amalgamated nature of the order, it is hard to say that the Bektashiyya held the original teachings of Bektash. Examples of numerous innovations include the new practices introduced by Balim Sultan (d. 1516), the second Patron Saint

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<sup>159</sup> Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions*, 339-40. For a detail, see, Birge, *The Bektashi Order*, 210-16. In this passage, Birge enumerates and gives a detailed list of parallels between the Bektashi order and the influenced religious elements. Köprülü also stresses the heretical aspect of the order as “those who joined it were regarded as heretics who considered everything that was religiously lawful to be religiously permissible, or they were deemed part of Hurufi sect and thus outside the Shari'ah.” Köprülü, *Early Mystics*, 104.

<sup>160</sup> Köprülü, *Early Mystics*, 104; see, also 123n66, which Köprülü, for the argument, exemplifies the saying of *Aşık Paşa Zade*, a great historian in the fifteenth century, who notes “Drug addiction and satanic practices are common among them and people are uncertain whether or not it is satanic.” As for the connection of the Bektashiyya to the Baba-Qalandari tradition, Köprülü argues that the Bektashis must be placed in the same category with the baba and the Qalandari-Haidari dervishes, it is not misleading to see with respect to the fundamental beliefs: Köprülü, *Islam in Anatolia*, 30.

<sup>161</sup> Köprülü, *Islam in Anatolia*, 29, Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions*, 339, Based upon *Aşık Paşa Zade Tarihi* (Istanbul, 1913), Birge, for instance, contends that “evidently by the year 1500 the tradition that the Janissaries received their headpiece from the Bektashis was well understood”. Birge, *The Bektashi Order*, 46.

of the order (*Pir Sani*),<sup>162</sup> and the heavy *Hurufi* influence in the fifteenth century.<sup>163</sup> In any case, Bektash himself did not establish a tariqa, rather his personality militated against founding such a great order.<sup>164</sup> Comparably and much more significantly, Bektash's legendary personality and thought exerted its direct influence on the people. It is via not the order itself but his legendary story in *Vilayetname* that Bektash impacted on Anatolian religious culture with a traditional figurehead image of the Patron Saint, which were long revered among innumerable local people and still remains as a familiar folklore of their day-to-day references.<sup>165</sup> In particular, his attitude of tolerant latitudinarianism toward the different religious people became an exemplary legend for the frontier populace. Bektash was a Patron Saint not only for the Bektashi order but also for the non-orthodox Turkish popular Sufism.

To sum up, the non-orthodox Sufism as represented by the baba-Qalandar-Bektashi tradition had marked its unique mode of religiosity and its related history as heavily tinged with the various religious elements. Concerning this feature, it is relevant to review the across-the-board debate on the origin of Sufism as discussed in the previous chapter. Based upon their examinations on the early Turkish Sufism, leading scholars such as Köprülü<sup>166</sup> and Ocak,<sup>167</sup> have reinforced the foreign origin thesis proposed by

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<sup>162</sup> Birge, *The Bektashi Order*, 56-8. It was Balim Sultan, Birge contends, that organized the Bektashis more formally order.

<sup>163</sup> Ibid, 58-62 and 148-61.

<sup>164</sup> Köprülü, *Early Mystics*, 104.

<sup>165</sup> Birge, *The Bektashi Order*, 40.

<sup>166</sup> See, for a representative statement, Köprülü, *Early Mystics*, 7, where he argues "Sufism hardly existed in the first centuries of Islam. It took shape under the influence of Iranian, Indian and Greek ideas,

both the orientalists and Islamists. To them, the aggregated version of the Baba-Qalandari-Bektashi tradition is proof of the extra-Islamic influence on the formation of Turkish Sufism.

For my part, the major pitfall with the foreign origin argument is that, just as the orientalist/Islamist thesis does, it overlooks the dynamics of Sufism by putting excessive and unbalanced emphasis on the baba tradition and through generalization and simplification of Turkish Sufism. Truly, as noted so far, it is not possible to dismiss either the agent role of the baba tradition for Islamization and Turkification in Anatolia or its nature as the blended Sufi manifestation of various religious traditions. From this, some scholars maintain that Turkish Sufism, as formed by the baba tradition, has an extra-Islamic origin. It is in this assumption that the problem of the foreign origin thesis lies. Though the thesis may be verifiable, at its best, insofar as to the baba tradition is concerned, it is certainly a mistake to present the baba tradition as the sole or even primary Sufi tradition that formed Turkish Sufism. It is because not only the baba tradition but also other forms of Sufism existed and played a considerable role in shaping Turkish Sufism. In order to clarify this point, it is necessary to note other Sufi forms paralleling and juxtaposing the non-orthodox forms.

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and to some degree Christianity – albeit taking most elements from Islam – and soon spread throughout the Muslim world.”

<sup>167</sup> Ocak sees the origin of Sufism as “a spontaneous synthesis” by claiming that “even though based on Islam, Sufism was the result of a synthesis of the mystical religions of Zoroastrianism and Manicheism in Iran and Buddhism in India, of the Hellenistic Gnostic and neo-platonic philosophical schools and finally of the mystical cultures of Egypt and Syria, which had inherited ancient Jewish and Christian mystical traditions.” Ahmet Yaşar Ocak, “Introduction” to *Sufism and Sufis in Ottoman Society: Sources, Doctrine, Rituals, Turuq, Architecture, Literature and Fine Arts, Modernism*, ed. Ahmet Yaşar Ocak (Ankara: Turkish Historical Society, 2005), xvii-xviii.



Scholars have a general tendency to group the existing Sufi manifestations in the formative period of Turkish Sufism into dichotomous categories. A comparative analysis of both the different scholarly conceptualizations and early Turkish history makes it possible to identify the distinctive features of the two groups. One group consists of the non-orthodox baba tradition, as discussed above, with its pre-Islamic, non-Islamic and non-Sunni nature. This group is depicted in the scholarly literature with characteristics such as ‘the Khurasani trend with divine love and ecstasy at its center,’<sup>168</sup> ‘the popular religiosity of the illiterate and folk’<sup>169</sup> and/or ‘the little Sufi tradition with Turkish in medium and rural in outlook.’<sup>170</sup> The other form is one represented by Ibn al-Arabi and Jalal al-Din Rumi and characterized by its respect for the Shari’a and the Sunni orthodoxy. Scholars typically describe this form such as ‘the Iraqi trend based on asceticism,’ ‘the elite Sufism’ and/or ‘the great Sufi tradition with Arabic and Persian medium and urban in outlook.’ The early Turks encountered, on the one hand, the non-orthodox Sufism in Khurasan, where the Malamati, the Hallajian and the Batini doctrines were predominant, and on the other, Sunni-orthodox Sufism in Baghdad, which maintained a fairly close relationship to Sunni Islam. The migration of the Turks brought both Sufi forms to Anatolia and developed Turkish Sufism thereof.

The scholars of the foreign origin thesis tend to stress and focus on the non-orthodox Baba tradition in explaining the Turkification and the Islamization phenomena.

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<sup>168</sup> Ahmet Yaşar Ocak, *Osmanlı Toplumunda Zındıklar ve Mülhidler (15. - 17. Yüzyıllar)* (Istanbul, Tarih Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 1998), 121-23.

<sup>169</sup> Köprülü, *Islam in Anatolia*, 3-15.

<sup>170</sup> Karamustafa, “Early Sufism,” 176-77.

Although their studies do not exclude the history of orthodox Sufism, they implicitly and explicitly consider it at a secondary level. The most apparent and striking example is Köprülü's groundbreaking works, which make a sharp distinction between the two groups and consider the baba tradition as the primary factor in the Turkified Islamization. For instance, in his *Türk Edebiyatında İlk Mutasavvıflar*,<sup>171</sup> the pioneering work for the roles of early Turkish Sufis, Ahmed Yasawi and Yunus Emre are portrayed markedly not mainly as independent great Sufis but in relation to the baba tradition. To a certain extent, it is from this sharp distinction and the baba-centric interpretation that Köprülü puts forth the foreign origin thesis.<sup>172</sup> No wonder, many scholars after him categorize this period as one of dichotomous religiosity between the heterodox, mass-oriented and the orthodox, elite-based Sufism, and assume the dominance of the former over the latter.

A critical assessment of this predominant trend has been made by several recent specialists. Karamustafa, the leading scholar on the issue, points out a number of problems with the trend. Above all, he raises a serious challenge by asking if the baba tradition actually played such a great role in the Islamization. Upon this question, Karamustafa applies his self-proposed 'the great and the little tradition paradigm,' referring respectively to the urban elite Sufi form and the baba tradition. From this paradigmatic perspective, he re-examines prominent babas, and demonstrates that there were no clear-cut divisions between the two Sufi groups; rather, the period that marked the birth of Turkish Sufism was a time of mutual affinity and attraction between the two

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<sup>171</sup> Köprülü's *Early Mystics in Turkish Literature* that I have referred to is an English translation of *Türk Edebiyatında İlk Mutasavvıflar* with updated notes and commentary.

<sup>172</sup> Köprülü, *Islam in Anatolia*, 13-14 and note 9.

groups, as indicated in the interactions of such prominent Sufis as Hajji Bektash, Barak Baba and Yunus Emre with both groups.<sup>173</sup> Further, many Turkish babas were not tribal shamanistic figures but “full-fledged Sufis” that were from *ulama* family background and/or familiar with Arabic and Persian. This aspect, for Karamustafa, refutes the colored image of the babas as ‘Islamized shamans’ in Köprülü’s initiative.<sup>174</sup> In addition, neither the Malamatiyya nor the Qalandariyya that Köprülü stresses as the continuation of the pre-Islamic tradition was such a powerful and widespread mystical trend as to play a major role in the formation of Anatolian Sufism.<sup>175</sup> This view has been supported by recent empirical studies. For instance, in his examination of the Islamization of the Mongols, Reuven Amitai-Preiss finds that, contrary to the Köprülüian thesis, it was not the extreme babas or ‘Islamized shamans’ but the Shari’a-minded ‘institutional Sufis,’ who influenced the conversion of the Mongol ruling circles.<sup>176</sup>

In fact, the feature of the frontier context with the strong mixture of various religious cultures does not correspond to the sharp division between the two forms of Sufism and its consequent foreign origin thesis. To me, the historical reality of the non-orthodox baba tradition in the frontier, be it a major or a minor movement in the early period, should be understood as an indication of the dynamics of the early Turkish Sufism, rather than as an evidence for the foreign origin thesis. The baba tradition was neither purely Islamic nor foreign, but a synthesis of both. This blended version appeared

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<sup>173</sup> Karamustafa, “Early Sufism,” 196-97.

<sup>174</sup> Ibid, 196-7.

<sup>175</sup> Karamustafa, “Origins of Anatolian Sufism,” 94.

<sup>176</sup> Reuven Amitai-Preiss, “Sufis and Shamans: Some Remarks on the Islamization of the Mongols in the Ilkhanate,” *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient*, vol. 42 /1 (1999), 27-46.

not from a simple amalgamation process but from a highly complex process of internalizing both Islam and the other religions. In other words, certain non-Islamic beliefs and practices survived in the tradition not merely under Islamic garb but were absorbed and internalized during the formation of Turkish Sufism. In the process of this internalization, the early babas emerged to have played a vital role in initiating the traditions of tolerant spirit toward other cultures, blended religious trends and non-orthodox heretical Sufism. In particular, having introduced and spread Sufism over Anatolia, the babas paved the way for later Sufis to penetrate Turkish culture. In this context appeared a number of great Sufis, the progenitors of Turkish Sufism. They developed their thoughts and practices of Sufism with an inescapable relationship to the non-orthodox baba trend. Some of these Sufis showed a different perception and interaction with the turbulent age of the frontier that the social unrest from the continuing warfare and the religious untidiness from the admixture of various cultures were predominant. The different interactions led them to seek another way, markedly different from and providing alternatives to the baba tradition. These Sufis initiated new modes of religiosity, some of which would be absorbed into tariqas, and the vast majority of which would continue as religio-cultural symbols for the Turks. Undisputedly, the most prominent of such “genius Sufi masters,” to use Köprülü’s term, were Ahmad Yasawi, Jalal al-Din Rumi and Yunus Emre.<sup>177</sup>

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<sup>177</sup> Although the influences of many non-Turkish great Sufis on the formation of Turkish Sufism cannot be by any means dismissed, here I analyzed exclusively Turkish Sufis in conformity of my purpose to present Turkish Sufism. I will deal with the non-Turkish Sufis’ influence later directly related to Gülen’s Sufism.

The first of ‘the genius Sufi masters’ is Ahmad Yasawi (d. 1166), chief of the *Masha’ikh-i turk* or the Turkic shaykhs. Yasawi, believed to have died in 1166-7,<sup>178</sup> was one of the earliest Sufis among the Turks of Central Asia. Though he is customarily portrayed as the founder of the Yasawi Sufi order, his massive influence has led several scholars to label him the founder of Turkish Sufism.<sup>179</sup> Although little is known about his life, the commonly-accepted view is that he had a Central Asian ethnic and cultural background, as indicated by the name ‘Yasawi’ originated from the name of his native town, Yasi, now known as Turkistan. According to Köprülü, his religious identity was greatly indebted to Yusuf Hamadani, a Persian Sufi and Hanafi jurist, whose thought strongly upheld the Shari’a.<sup>180</sup> After completing his training under Hamadani, he returned to Yasi to develop and teach his mystical thought in conciliating the Shari’a.<sup>181</sup> Yasawi’s most influential teachings include, first, ‘master-disciple relationship’ that stressed a disciple’s complete and humble surrender to his shaykh, second, *Khalwa* or ‘retirement for religious devotions’ that emphasized the Shari’a-based *Khalwa* like ‘complete repentance’ as prerequisite to the tariqa-oriented *Khalwa*, and third, *dhikr-i arra* or ‘vocal

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<sup>178</sup> Some scholars like Dewese and Karamustafa question about 1166-7 as the year of Yasawi’s death, arguing that Yasawi most probably died in the early thirteenth century; see, Devin DeWeese, “The Masha’ikh-i Turk and the Khojagan: Rethinking the links between the Yasavi and the Naqshbandi Sufi Traditions.” *Journal of Islamic Studies* 7/2 (July 1996), 183; and, Karamustafa, “Origins of Anatolian Sufism,” 76.

<sup>179</sup> The name “Pir-i Turkistan” that refers to Ahmad Yasawi indicates his significant influence. Even, Köprülü portrays Yasawi Sufism virtually synonymously as Turkish Sufism; Köprülü, *Early Mystics*, 105.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid, 105-6; Furthermore, he is said to have been a close tie with the famous Abu al-Nadjib Shurawardi (d. 1168) at Khurasan; Karamustafa, “Origins of Anatolian Sufism,” 77.

<sup>181</sup> Köprülü, *Early Mystics*, 58-64.

dhikr' that later became the hallmark of the mystical practice of the Yasawi order.<sup>182</sup> In consonance with his Sunni Sufi identity and contrary to the baba tradition,<sup>183</sup> Yasawi minimized the foreign influence in his thought. Yet like the early babas, he did not seek to negate traditional shamanistic customs.<sup>184</sup> He, rather, used traditional religious cultures to disseminate Islamic belief among the Turks. Yasawi preached and addressed in a unique 'simple and national style,' that is, through basic/popular contemporary Turkish so that ordinary people could easily access and understand his teachings.<sup>185</sup> In particular, even though Yasawi knew Arabic and Persian, the primary language of religious sciences and court, he composed Turkic hymns (*ilahi*) called *hikmats* (wisdoms) as a means of proselytization. Largely thanks to this focalized method suitable to the masses, he gained thousands of disciples in his lifetime, initiated the Yasawi tradition, contributed to the

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<sup>182</sup> See for Yasawi teachings, *ibid*, 95-96, 99-100, and 101-2. According Köprülü, the name '*arra*' came from the recitation which resembled the sound of a bucksaw.

<sup>183</sup> The issue of the Sunni Sufi identity of Ahmad Yasawi is incompatible among the scholars. Even, Köprülü's analysis itself is not consistent. While Köprülü first describes Yasawi as a Sunni Sufi in his early work *Türk Edebiyatında İlk Mutasavvırlar*, he later on radically revised this view, considering Yasawi one of the non-orthodox babas; see, Köprülü, *Early Mystics*, 58-64. This revised thesis has dominated most studies of Anatolian Turkish Sufism such as those of Vyrous and Yavuz, who have tended to situate Yasawi in the tradition of the non-orthodox; Vyrous, 364, which sees Yasawi as a successor of Hallaj Sufism and Yavuz, "Is There a Turkish Islam?," 218, which locates Yasawi as "the main intellectual source of heterodox Islam." However, this non-orthodox identity of Yasawi has been constantly challenged by several scholars like Gölpınarlı, Dewese and Karamustafa. According to their examinations, contrary to Köprülü's revised thesis - but quite in keeping with his first presentation, neither Ahmad Yasawi was a heterodox Türkmen baba alien to the Sunni Sufism yet akin to Shi'ism, Batinism or Malamatism, nor was his teaching such heretical fitted to the illiterate nomadic Turks on the frontiers of the Islamic world. Instead, both his identity and the Yasawi order were fundamentally Sunni orthodox; see, Abdülbaki Gölpınarlı, *Türkiye'de Mezhepler ve Tarikatlar*, (Istanbul: İnkılap Kitabevi, 1969), 198-200; Dewese, "The Masha'ikh-i Turk and the Khojagan," 180-207; Karamustafa, "Origins of Anatolian Sufism," 71-78.

<sup>184</sup> Köprülü, *Early Mystics*, 106.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid*, 106.

Islamization of Turkish tribes, and above all, empowered Turkish popular Islam and ‘Turkish national spirit.’<sup>186</sup>

Yasawi’s legend soon spread in the Turkic-speaking populace ranging from the Syr Darga region, Kirghiz, Transoxiana, Khurasan to Anatolia. Many Turkish mystics under Yasawi’s inspiration came to Anatolia along with the Turkic migration after the Mongol invasion and rooted the Yasawi legend there.<sup>187</sup> Though the Yasawi tradition was not established as a distinctive order in Anatolia, it nevertheless left an eminent mark both on genuine Sufis like Hajji Bektash and Yunus Emre and on prominent orders like the Bektashiyya and the Naqshbandiyya, having contributed to “the formation of the popular side of the new Islamic Turkish civilization.”<sup>188</sup> The Yasawi tradition continued to exert its influence throughout the history and over the most parts of the Turkic world by such means as the everlasting reminders of Yasawi legend such as his grave and mosque built in the late fourteenth century (1397-8) at Timur, the Yasawi order, the first Turkic tariqa that was also called the *Jahriyya* derived from Yasawi’s vocal *dhikr* (*dhikr-i jahrt*), and *Divan-i Hikmat*, one of the first literary Turkish works on Islam that paved a way for a distinctive literary tradition of popular Islamic poetry (*ilahi*) as greatly

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<sup>186</sup> See, *ibid*, 24-26.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid*, 36-7; However, Karamustafa argues that Köprülü’s thesis of a Yasawi influence on Anatolian Sufism must be discharged insofar as it is a baseless assumption that great numbers of Yasawi dervishes migrated to Anatolia; Karamustafa, “Origins of Anatolian Sufism,” 83-4. For my part, even though there is no historical evidence for the direct influence, the Yasawi’s contribution is still observable in an indirect way through Hajji Bektash and Yunus Emre, both of whom were influenced by Ahmad Yasawi.

<sup>188</sup> Köprülü considers the Bektashiyya and the Naqshbandiyya as issuing from Ahmad Yasawi; Köprülü, *Early Mystics*, 102-105. For a recent reassessment of this relation, see, Irene Mélikoff, “Ahmad Yesevi and Turkic popular Islam,” *EJOS* (Electronic Journal of Oriental Studies), VI (2003), No. 8, 1-9.

advanced by Yunus Emre.<sup>189</sup> Notably, by his initiated Turkified Sufi version, “Ahmad Yasawi stands as the prototype of all the Turkish Sufis,”<sup>190</sup> regardless of their personal affiliations attached to non-orthodox or orthodox differentiation, and his Sufism continued to serve as a spiritual ancestry, imbuing the ‘national Turkish spirit.’<sup>191</sup>

Notwithstanding the significant place of Yasawi, as Karamustafa points out, Ahmad Yasawi “was not the only ‘real’ Turkish Sufi in a time period of two centuries, and Sufism did not sit like a veneer on the thinly disguised ancestral religious practices of shamanist Turks in early Turkish Anatolia: by this time, Sufism was, rather, the natural color of the hardwood of Turkish religious culture.”<sup>192</sup> In fact, Turkish Sufism was by no means shaped as or through an individual Sufism, far more than that, it was a cumulatively colored culture painted by numerous genius Sufis. Among such painters was the renowned Jalal al-din Rumi, who left a mark on the character of Turkish Sufism.

Jalal al-Din Rumi (d. 1273) came out of the milieu influenced by the early babas. Rumi added his own colors to Turkish Sufism, building on the groundwork laid by Ahmed Yasawi. Aflaki’s *Manaqeb al-arefin*,<sup>193</sup> the work dedicated to Jalal al-Din Rumi, describes him as one of many immigrants like other Anatolian holy men during the

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<sup>189</sup> The authorship of *Divan-i Hikmat* has been a subject to scholarly examination. In Köprülü’s literal analysis, though it does not belong to Ahmad Yasawi, it is matching with the forms and the spirit of the Yasawi’s works. On the contrary, for Deweese and Karamustafa, *Divan-i Hikmat* neither is the work of Yasawi nor directly reflect the views of Yasawi; see, Deweese, “The Masha’ikh-i Turk and the Khojagan,” 183-4 and Karamustafa, “Origins of Anatolian Sufism,” 77-8.

<sup>190</sup> Trimingham, *The Sufi Orders in Islam*, 54.

<sup>191</sup> Köprülü, *Early Mystics*, 37, 102.

<sup>192</sup> Karamustafa, 197-8.

<sup>193</sup> This work began its writing in 1318, forty-five years after Rumi’s death and finished in 1353. As such, it is the primary source for Rumi’s life and thought. I have referred to its English translation, Shams al-Din Ahmad Aflaki, *The Feats of the Knowers of God: Manaqeb Al-Arefin*.



Mongol invasion. He fled from his native Balkh to the Seljuks of Rum and finally settled in Konya, where the Seljuk sultans provided a safe environment for immigrant religious men.<sup>194</sup> His training of Islam and Sufism began under his father, Baha' ad-Din Walad (d. 1231), a distinguished scholar, steeped in the mystical tradition, and continued under Burhan ad-din al-Muhaqqiq at-Tirmidhi (d. 1244), through whom Rumi acquired his ascetic and pious views. It was, however, Shams ad-din Tabrizi who changed Rumi's life completely to become a greatest Sufi and a most prolific and inspiring master of mystical poetic expression.<sup>195</sup> Shams' death led Rumi to compose a wealth of music, dance and lyric poems, *Divani Shamsi Tabriz*. Apart from the *Divan*, he wrote great many verses of lyric poetry including the magnificent *Mathnawi*, one of the greatest works of Sufi poetry. As these works illustrate, the main feature of Rumi's thought and teachings is Islamic, pantheistic, syncretistic, and tolerant. Above all, the key term that penetrates all his thought is *Tawhid* or union with his Beloved, as stressed in the *Mathnawi* that is widely considered a revelation of the inner meaning of the Qur'an as it has been called 'the Qur'an in Persian' since Jami's initiative.<sup>196</sup> Indeed, the *Mathnawi* is replete with fables that express Rumi's mystical understanding and experience of the Qur'anic revelations in the poetical form. This aspect indicates the Islamic origin of Rumi's thought and

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<sup>194</sup> Ibid, 7-41.

<sup>195</sup> Köprülü, *Early Mystics*, 202; as Köprülü notes, Nicholson describes Tabrizi like a Qalandar who was, though illiterate, filled with spiritual ecstasy and magic, and entertained the most broad-minded mystical notions. See, Reynold A. Nicholson, *Selected poems from the Divani Shamsi Tabriz* (Cambridge, University Press, 1952), xx.

<sup>196</sup> Trimingham, *The Sufi Orders in Islam*, 61.

experience of Sufism.<sup>197</sup> On the other hand, the notion of unity also refers to the pantheistic nature of Rumi's Sufism, as it seeks the primal origin, to return to and reunite with the Beloved.<sup>198</sup> For this intricate pantheism, Rumi exercised his creative synthetic power to weld the basic ideas of Neoplatonism, al-Hallaj and Ibn Arabi into his own thought. Accordingly, this pantheist unity developed some heretical ideas including his most unique and well-known mystical practice, *sama* or 'circling dance.' Though the *sama* has been censured by many orthodox ulama, it is not such a simple heretical practice but a dynamic ritual. Schimmel analyzes the *sama* as a ritual consisting of Rumi's conceptualization of the use of music, poetry and dancing as a path for the unity with God in order for its practitioners to concentrate fully on the divine, his philosophical consideration of universe as a series of harmonious celestial spheres, and his elaboration of its performance as an Islamic experience followed by an opening hymn in honor of the Prophet.<sup>199</sup> The syncretistic feature of Rumi's pantheism is somewhat reminiscent of the baba tradition. However, the two are essentially different. While the baba tradition is the Islamic-guised aggregated version of Sufism as discussed above, Rumi's pantheism is the

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<sup>197</sup> While Schimmel puts an emphasis on the Islamic aspect of Rumi's thought, Menage further accentuates Rumi's Islamic mysticism in contrast to "the Islam of the babas"; see, Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions*, 318, and Menage, "Islamization of Anatolia," 59-60.

<sup>198</sup> Köprülü considers Rumi as "the greatest and most influential representative of pantheism in Persian Sufi literature"; *Early Mystics*, 201. Schimmel also asserts "Rumi was a representative of the pantheistic trend and a mouthpiece of Ibn Arabi's ideas"; *Mystical Dimensions*, 328. Schimmel and many scholars have noted Rumi's relation to Ibn Arabi's teachings through Sadr al-Din Qunawi (d. 1274), a disciple of Ibn `Arabi and a contemporary of Rumi. Rumi is said to have close friendship with Qunawi in Konya and as such have acquainted from him with Arabi's thought. Indeed, Rumi's pantheistic thought may be a good indication of his indebted to Arabi's philosophy of illumination. For a recent access on Rumi's pantheism, see, William Chittick, "Rumi and *Wahdat al-Wujud*," in *Poetry and Mysticism in Islam: The Heritage of Rumi*, edited by A. Banani, R. Hovannisian, and G. Sabagh (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 70-111.

<sup>199</sup> See, Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions*, 182-86 and 325.

Islamic-centric synthesized Sufism. Rumi's thought and teachings of the Islamic, pantheistic and syncretistic unity coincides with his tolerance toward other faiths. Concurring with his famous assertion "I am neither Christian, nor Jew, nor Gabr, nor Moslem,"<sup>200</sup> Rumi maintained a close and friendly relationship with diverse religious and ethnic people. The most impressive indication of Rumi's tolerance is his funeral, where people of such different ethnic and religious background as Christians, Jews, Greeks, Arabs, Turks and others not just appeared but actively participated, grieving over him as one of their own saints.<sup>201</sup>

It was Rumi's inclusive and tolerant thought and behavior that appealed to people, resulting in a great number of converts. Rumi's revered title *Mawlana* or 'Our Master' is a strong indication of his influence. Compared to the babas that exerted their influence primarily on the lay religiosity, Rumi was not only the Mawlana for the laity but also for the upper-urban classes such as sultans, politicians, ulama, and *akhis* or merchants in great cities.<sup>202</sup> Nor was his influence confined to certain ethnicities, religions or places of Anatolia. Rumi's honored identity was perpetuated by means such as *sama* that provided a distinctive Islamic fine arts, and the masterpiece works like *Mathnawi* that facilitated his legend to transcend borders of nationality, ethnicity, time and space. The Mawlawi order, although Rumi himself did not actually found it,<sup>203</sup> appeared immediately after his

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<sup>200</sup> Nicholson, *Selected poems from the Divani Shamsi Tabriz*, 125, which records "What is to be done, O Moslems? For I do not recognize myself. I am neither Christian, nor Jew, nor Gabr, nor Moslem. I am not of the East, nor of the West, nor of the land, nor of the sea."

<sup>201</sup> Aflaki, *The Feats of the Knowers of God*, 405-406.

<sup>202</sup> Aflaki's *Manaqeb* is full of stories about people of the upper-urban classes who became followers of Rumi.

<sup>203</sup> Köprülü, *Islam in Anatolia*, 19.

death as a hereditary institution, and played a significant role in spreading his teachings especially among the urbanite by keeping a friendly relationship with the state elites and remaining far from any religio-political conflicts with Sunni orthodox regime.<sup>204</sup> As all of these outward instruments bear, the most effective means for the profound influence of Rumi is the spirit of religious syncretism and tolerance as exemplified by his consistent acts of cultural exchanges and inter-religious dialogue. It was with this spirit that Rumi had an indelible mark on the founding of Turkish Sufism as its kernelling principle.

While Yasawi integrated Sufism with Turkish national spirit, Rumi colored it with a deeper and richer brush of philosophical speculation. A chief beneficiary of the spiritual and intellectual heritage of Yasawi and Rumi was Yunus Emre. Yet, he was not a simple recipient, but a genuine Turkish Sufi who brought together the traditions of Yasawi and Rumi and created a new mystic system. Emre did not only advance the most refined philosophy of Islamic-Neoplatonist Sufism that was implanted in the Turkish context by Rumi's Sufism, but further presented it in Turkish in a reinvigorated way of the tradition set by Yasawi for the mass religiosity.<sup>205</sup> In this sense, his influence is in no way inferior to those of Yasawi and Rumi. In fact, a recent scholar describes Emre's work as the completeness of the Turkish conceptualization of religion.<sup>206</sup>

In spite of his dominant mark on the Turkish religiosity and his prominence in academic research, Emre's life is little known. Many scholars suggest that Emre lived

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<sup>204</sup> See, *ibid*, 18-20.

<sup>205</sup> Köprülü, *Early Mystics*, 322.

<sup>206</sup> Yavuz, "Is there a Turkish Islam?," 218.

between 1240 and 1320,<sup>207</sup> the period when the Yasawi tradition and Rumi's legend were popularized. According to *Divan*, Yunus Emre's early career as a poor Anatolian peasant linked him to Hajji Bektash, who in turn introduced him to Taptuk Emre, another great Anatolian mystic.<sup>208</sup> It was Taptuk Emre who took Yunus as a disciple training him to become a genuine Sufi. As frequently noted in his *Divan*, Yunus's sincere and absolute devotion to Taptuk's spiritual guide for forty years finally led him to the efflorescence of his long years of mystic contemplation.<sup>209</sup> He used his poetic gifts to pour out his experienced-based thought as complicated as and somewhat identical to Rumi's pantheism. Unlike Rumi, Yunus did not write in Persian but employed the Yasawian style, that is, the use of the simplest Turkish so that even ignorant people access to spiritual guidance.<sup>210</sup> His creative ability to express the most profound metaphysical mysticism in the most popular national form is Yunus' brilliant and distinguished achievement. By combing Islamic Neo-Platonism and the Turkish national culture, Yunus created his own type of Sufism, which Köprülü labels the 'Yunus Emre style.'<sup>211</sup> This unique 'Yunus Emre style' is well displayed in his famous work, *Divan*. Although scholars argue over the authenticity of many poems in numerous manuscript copies of the

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<sup>207</sup> Köprülü, *Early Mystics*, 268-72; Abdülbâki Gölpınarlı, *Yunus Emre ve Tasavvuf* (Istanbul: Remzi Kitabevi, 1961), 62-73.

<sup>208</sup> For the identity of Taptuk Emre, see, *ibid*, 41-50.

<sup>209</sup> Köprülü, *Early Mystics*, 271-2.

<sup>210</sup> *Ibid*, 322-4.

<sup>211</sup> See, *ibid*, 322, 363. Adducing from the creativity of Emre that produced his own style, Köprülü further argues for Yunus' literacy against the popular image of his illiterate; see, *ibid*, 272-74.

*Divan*<sup>212</sup> it is still a working hypothesis to accept the *Divan* as Yunus Emre's work and as the primary reference for information about his personality, thought and teachings.<sup>213</sup>

The main theme in Emre's *Divan* is love that consisted of Islamic and pantheistic elements and is sublimated in humanism. Just as his predecessors such as Yasawi and Rumi, Emre takes Islam as the focal point of his faith, confessing and confirming the teachings of the Qur'an, Sunna and the Shari'a as the ground of his religious thought and experience.<sup>214</sup> Within this Islamic framework, he regards Sufism as a necessary way for one to realize his religious goal.<sup>215</sup> To Emre, Sufism presents the way of trusting in and submitting to God (*tawakkul wa taslim*) and surmounting the worldly self and carnal passion, and finally awakening to the secret relationship of divinity and humanity. Virtually identical to the pantheistic concept of 'Wahdat al-Wujud' or the unity of being as refined by Ibn Arabi and Rumi, Emre finds the Divine in humanity and asserts the unity of divinity and humanity.<sup>216</sup> In this way, he reiterates the concept of 'Wahdat al-Wujud,' the most popular theme of Islamic mysticism. What is peculiar to and most striking in Emre's pantheism is his extension of the idea to humanism.<sup>217</sup> In Emre's inductive logic, since humanity is not separate from divinity and the divine is imbedded in humanity, all human beings are divine and, in terms of divinity, they are ultimately

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<sup>212</sup> For the numerous copies of the *Divan*, see, *ibid*, 328.

<sup>213</sup> *Ibid*, 302-4 and 327-8.

<sup>214</sup> *Ibid*, 308.

<sup>215</sup> *Ibid*, 333.

<sup>216</sup> See, *ibid*, 308-311.

<sup>217</sup> For Emre's idea of humanism, see, Talat Halman, "Yunus Emre's Humanism," in *Yunus Emre and his Mystical Poetry*, ed. Talat S. Halman (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University, 1981), 1-21.

equal regardless of their ethnic and religious divisions. From this humanistic understanding, Emre advises one to tolerate others by making no distinctions among people, and calls people of all faiths and nations to come together in and for peace. It is also from this humanistic view that Emre most gravely criticizes the orthodox legalists or dogmatists as separatists among people and religions. They are like ships in the sea of Reality, which separate people into seventy two sects, blocking the way to God and the ultimate Truth. Thus, they are rebels against Truth and should be defied.<sup>218</sup> In opposition to the orthodox separatists, a true Sufi makes no distinctions but looks at the seventy two sects as equal. For Emre's part, this Sufi way can be actualized solely through love. As his *Divan* highlights, it is with love that Emre begins and develops his own Sufi path.<sup>219</sup> By love alone, he eliminates his carnal self, overcomes the duality of the self and the divine, feels the secret of divine unity, and realizes his humanistic and ecumenical worldview. Though "the lover is never at ease"<sup>220</sup> and the path of love is filled with many dangerous traps, it is only through and thanks to love that one attains the state of the perfect man (*insan'ı kamil*), who manifests and reflects the Divine in the most perfect form (*ahsan-i taqwim*).<sup>221</sup>

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<sup>218</sup> Abdülbâki Gölpınarlı, *Yunus Emre: Risalat al-Nushiyya ve Divan* (Istanbul: Sulhi Garan Matbaası Koll. Sti., 1965), 49.

<sup>219</sup> As Emre asserts, for example, "İy asıklar iy asıkları mezheb u din iskdur bana" [O lovers, O lovers, the creed of religion is love to me]; *ibid*, 41.

<sup>220</sup> As Emre has experienced and notes, "Duzaga dusen gulmez asıklar rahat olmaz. Soylerem dilum bilmez bir aceb ile geldum" [One who fails in the trap does not laugh. The lovers are never at ease. No one knows my saying. I have come to a wondrous world]; *ibid*, 97.

<sup>221</sup> See, Köprülü, *Early Mystics*, 312-318.

Emre's teaching of the Sufi way of love, paralleling to those of Yasawi and Rumi, contributed greatly to the formation of Turkish Islam and continued to exert a great influence on Turkish religious and non-religious culture to this day. Soon after his death, Emre's legend spread throughout Anatolia, producing many imitators of his poetic style and thought. The existence of his numerous graves that were competitively hosted by different Anatolian regions shows the extent of his influence.<sup>222</sup> It is significant to note that his influence did not occur via any tariqa form, while those of Yasawi and Rumi spread partly owing to their respective tariqas.<sup>223</sup> Emre neither founded nor was associated with any tariqa, nevertheless he was widely respected as an inspiring Turkish Sufi. The love-based humanism, which forms the foundation of his poetry, is the very factor of his continued influence. His hymns embodying the quintessence of Turkish Anatolian-Islamic humanism served as spiritual and intellectual fountainheads of the humanistic approach in the Turkish frontier context. Emre's use of the simple folk Turkish was a manifestation of his working concepts of love and humanism. In sharp contrast to the poems composed in Persian and Arabic and available only to the then highly educated, Emre's preference for the vernacular of his own people helped the masses internalize and actualize humanistic love in their living environment. As such, his legend has occupied a prominent and saintly position in Anatolia folklore. Actually, the folk-centric style of Emre indicates the influence of Ahmed Yasawi enough to position Emre in the chain of Yasawian tradition. However, as an individual Sufi poet freed from a tariqa confinement, Emre created his own form producing sublime metaphysical

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<sup>222</sup> Ibid, 277. See also 274-277 for the major burial places and tombs claimed to be Yunus Emre's.

<sup>223</sup> In this aspect, Köprülü differentiates Emre's place to that of Yasawi; see, ibid, 324 and 370.



doctrines with such popular and simplified Turkish poems that helped the masses comprehend and integrate Sufism into their daily lives. Consequently, Emre became the cultural symbol of Turkish humanism.

Ahmad Yasawi, Jalal al-Din Rumi and Yunus Emre, as widely considered in academia as the founders of Turkish Sufism,<sup>224</sup> contributed greatly to the formation of Turkish Sufism. Their pioneering thoughts helped to carve Sufism into a vernacular Turkish form, painting it with their distinctive colors. Particularly, their active interactions with the frontier context and the baba tradition led them to create new interpretations of Sufism, which became the founding characteristics of Turkish Sufism.

Following in the wake of the baba tradition in the frontier context, the three great Sufis enhanced and vernaculized the tolerant nature of Sufism. Yasawi's localized reading of Islam in the shamanist tradition, Rumi's inclusive and embracing approach to the other religious traditions and Emre's love-based humanism impacted on the tolerant spirit of the Turkish culture. In projecting their tolerant views on the frontier, however, the three Sufis assumed a unique Sufi pattern strikingly different from the features that the babas commonly marked. In sharp contrast to the babai Sufism of 'diluted Islam by other faiths and practices' or 'the Islamic-guised aggregated version of Sufism,' Yasawi, Rumi and Emre were similar in putting Islamic faith into the fore of their thoughts of Sufism and mystical experience, having created, what might be called, an Islamic-centered synthesized Sufism. They reformulated Sufism to the Islamic-centered version in the dominance of the non-orthodox baba tradition. As a consequence, these three Sufis

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<sup>224</sup> For a comparative research on the three Sufis, see, Ahmet Yaşar Ocak, *Türkiye'de Tarihin Saptırılması Sürecinde Türk Sûfiliğine Bakışlar*.

enabled Islam to play a constitutive role in the melting pot of diverse ethnic and religious groups through the medium of the Islamic-centered Sufism. Truly, this Islamic-centered Sufism did not have its distinctive appearance from the beginning. Yasawi, Rumi and Emre had just initiated this new Sufi mood in the then Turkish society where the babai Sufism was still predominant. As the influences of the Sufis became prevalent, however, the Islamic-centered Sufism developed its own distinctiveness, which would be later considered as 'orthodox Sufism' differentiating it from the non-orthodox forms of the baba tradition. On the other hand, the existence of this Islamic-centered Sufism counters with the thesis of the non-Islamic origin of Turkish Sufism and points out its pitfalls, which focuses exclusively on the non-orthodox babai Sufism, while downplaying or even ignoring the Sufi forms that the great Sufis initiated.

A chronological overview of the formative period makes it clear that Turkish Sufism was initiated by the early babas and later formed by individual great Sufis. Despite ongoing scholarly debate, the role of the early babas should be neither downplayed nor overemphasized. It is obvious that they played a significant role in introducing and spreading Sufism. Nevertheless, it would be misleading to consider the early babas the progenitors of Turkish Sufism. The Sufi form that they assumed was nothing but an elementary and abstract one that was heavily tinged with the shamanistic tradition. Moreover, although this form impacted on the birth of the non-orthodox Sufi trend, its originality soon disappeared, leaving behind its abstract trace. Nor has its related trend of the non-orthodox Sufism become the main current of Turkish Sufism at any historical point. In contrast, it was such great Sufi masters as Yasawi, Rumi and Emre who were the cornerstone of Turkish Sufism. Their vernacularized writings and

nation-wide influence created a new Turkish mode of Sufism in an appealing, practical and suitable to the Turkish frontier culture. The prominent role of the great Sufis, on the other hand, makes it difficult to locate tariqas at the center of the formation of Turkish Sufism. Contrary to the tariqa-focused approach of the modern academia, it is apparent that Turkish form of Sufism came into being through the great individual Turkish Sufis rather than Sufi institutions. In the first place, tariqas were not founded until after this formative period. Many modern scholars believe that the thirteenth century saw the emergence of the standardized orders in Turkey. Yet, it was not until after the fifteenth century that the Sufi orders appeared as a fully developed hierarchical system. This fact negates any attempt to signify tariqa patterns in forming Turkish Sufism. As far as institutionalized Sufism is concerned, it was not tariqas but *tekkes* or Sufi lodges that were popular in the thirteenth and the fourteenth centuries. Having been formed around charismatic Sufi figures, the tekkes served as centers for the sanctification of the Sufi saints, the diffusion of their thoughts and the standardization of their practices, and acted as a communicational belt between the saints and society. Unlike later emerged tariqas, these Sufi lodges embraced diverse religious and ethnic people regardless of their affiliation. As Wolper's examination of the tekkes of this period clearly notes, it was not government patrons or Sufi orders but the individual Sufi lodges that provided the framework for new communal formations.<sup>225</sup> The new communal formations were, to quote Karamustafa, 'Sufi saint's cults,'<sup>226</sup> a great many of which, including that of Yunus Emre, continued as independent mystical trends resisting placement into any known

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<sup>225</sup> Wolper, *Cities and Saints*, 13.

<sup>226</sup> Karamustafa, "Origins of Anatolian Sufism," 93.

initiativ chains (*silsila*), while others were later absorbed into tariqas.<sup>227</sup> As such, the existence of the tekkes shows the significant role of individual Sufis in the formation of Turkish Sufism, countering the tariqa-centric approach.<sup>228</sup> In addition, the fact that Yasawi, Rumi and Emre did not actually found Sufi orders counters the tariqa-associated confinement of their influence. They were the fountainheads not just for numerous *tekkes* and later tariqas, but further for the whole of Turkish Sufism.

The impact of Yasawi, Rumi and Emre was maximized by their active involvement in society. In contrast with a well-known image of Sufis as mystics who maintain quiet and contemplative lives secluded in lodges for a personal mystical experience, the early Turkish Sufis did not direct their religious lives in isolation from society. Instead, they were at the very center of society, interacting and infusing it with their Sufi beliefs and practices. This manifestation of Sufism, which would be characterized as ‘socially-engaged Sufism,’ is intrinsically linked to the frontier context. Just as the frontier context where many momentous factors like the Crusades, Mongol invasion and the continuous warfare led people to a feeling of insecurity, the social/political unrest and the spiritual fermentation, it also drove the great Sufis like Yasawi, Rumi and Emre to be preoccupied with ‘this-worldly’ matters and to provide a consolable and alternative ‘other-worldly’ religiosity of mysticism. For this purpose, the

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<sup>227</sup> As the saint’s cults developed fully in the Ottoman period, I discuss this topic in detail in the part “The development phase of Turkish Sufism.

<sup>228</sup> For instance, Yavuz shows his tariqa-centric interpretation in his assertion that “The story of Turkish Islam is an example of the localization of a universal teaching through the works of the Sufi orders”; “Is there a Turkish Islam?,” 218. Köprülü counters with this interpretation by distinguishing the thoughts of the great Sufis from the disciplines of the later developed Sufi orders, as he contends “it is by no means correct to search for an identity between the patron saints on whom the tariqas relied and the beliefs and way of life of the members of a given tariqa”; Köprülü, *Islam in Anatolia*, 19.

Sufis utilized the simple and popular Turkish language, the old pre-Islamic traditions and the syncretistic/tolerant brand of Sufism, all of which facilitated their proposing Sufi alternative to permeate the frontier populace. As a natural outcome of the frontier context, socially-engaged Sufism was certainly not peculiar to the great Sufis but common to the baba tradition save the early wandering babas who had little regard for societal activities. Even, the babai rebellion was a result of the babas engagement in social issues.

The active interaction of the Sufis with some prominent socio-political arenas is remarkable. Above all, the Sufis maintained a close relationship with the state and, in many cases, were deeply involved in state affairs. Although the babai revolt leading to the state's political antagonism towards the Sufi movements was a rare and special case, it nevertheless initiated the significance of a friendly relationship with the state. Despite the revolt, the Seljuk rulers generally showed great respect and affection for the Sufi masters as indicated by their support of numerous lodges with generous endowments.<sup>229</sup> Without a doubt, this official approval provided a firm foundation for Turkish Sufism. The Sufis' active participation in the frontier warfare also contributed to their intimate connection with the state. In general, Sufi masters provided a religious justification of warfare by teaching the virtue of the war for God or *ghaza* and accentuating the other-worldly rewards for the sincere *ghazi*, the warrior for God. In particular, as clearly shown in the baba-Qalandar-Bektashi tradition, the Sufi babas were deeply engaged in the establishment of the Janissary army corps and many of them devoted themselves to holy war (armed jihad). In addition, the Sufis had a close bond with elite groups. Since a great

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<sup>229</sup> Köprülü, *Islam in Anatolia*, 9.

number of ulama were Sufis during the formative period, there were no clear distinctions between ulama and Sufis, nor substantial conflicts between them. The Sufi works written in Persian such as Rumi's were widely circulated in the elite class of ulama who spoke Persian and were greatly influenced by Persian culture. It is also necessary to note the close association of the Sufis with the *futuwa* organizations, the important and widespread trade guilds in the thirteenth and the fourteenth centuries.<sup>230</sup> These commercial guilds were under the leadership of the *akhis*, unmarried Sufi craftsmen, who followed the ideal virtue of *futuwa* such as honesty, peacefulness, generosity and altruism.<sup>231</sup> They came to play a preeminent role in the economic life of Anatolia and exerted a political influence on the state. The *futuwa* guilds further developed through the increasing Sufi influence, provided funding sources for the Sufi movements and had a great effect on the organization of tariqas.<sup>232</sup> Another manifestation of socially-engaged Sufism is an urban Sufism. In sharp contrast with the popular distinction between 'Sunni Islam in urban areas and Sufi Islam in rural areas,' the active interaction of the Sufis with social institutions made Sufism dominant in the cities of Anatolia. Of considerable importance for the Sufi urbanite was Rumi, who played a leading role in the progressive

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<sup>230</sup> For the intrinsic relationship of *futuwa* organizations and the Sufis, see, Deodaat Breebaart, *The development and structure of the Turkish futuwah guilds*, Ph. D. diss. (Princeton University, 1961); and, Mehmet Sarıkaya, *XIII-XVI. asırlardaki Anadolu'da Fütüüvetnamelere Göre Dini İnanç Motifleri* (Ankara: Kültür Bakanlığı Yay, 2002), 127-54.

<sup>231</sup> For enumerated *futuwa* virtues in Sufism, see, Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥusayn Sulami and Suleyman Ates. *Tasavvufu futuvel* (Ankara: Ankara Üniversitesi. 1977), 135.

<sup>232</sup> It seems that there is a scholarly disagreement on the identity of the *futuwwa* organizations. For instance, while Köprülü considers it as a tariqa originated from batinism, Trimmingham distinguishes it from a tariqa; see, comparably, Köprülü, *Early Mystics in Turkish Literature*, 200-201 and Trimmingham, *The Sufi Orders in Islam*, 25-25. Nevertheless, the scholars are unanimous for the close association of the organizations and the Sufi orders.

transformation of Sufism into urban life and the creation of urban-oriented Sufi movements. It was through all of these social connections and accompanying social activities that the Sufis characterized socially-engaged Sufism and made Sufism penetrate every corner of Turkish society. Through their social activities, Yasawi, Rumi and Emre became a legendary example of and intellectual reference to the spirit of tolerance that acted as a buffer for tensions and/or clashes generated by the ethnic, religious and social factions. In this way, they provided a foundation of the spirit of tasawwuf in the Turkish context, which would be perpetuated as a spiritual, cultural and national heritage. Specifically, the indigenusness of Yasawi, tolerance of Rumi, and love of Emre continue to have served as such a national heritage.

In light of the whole picture of the formative period of Turkish Sufism from the appearance of babas in the ninth century to the activities of the prominent Turkish Sufis up to the fourteenth century, it is safe to conclude that Turkish Sufism was formed with the inclusive characteristics of frontier, tolerance, syncretism, and sociality. These characteristics appeared as outcomes of internalization and localization of Sufism in the Turkish context. As such, they highlight the distinctiveness of Turkish Sufism in contrast to Sufi manifestations of other regions, revealing and confirming the dynamic Sufism that, as underlined in the previous part, indicates ‘the diverse manifestations of Sufism in the face of a wide variety of the changing contexts.’ Turkish Sufism, which was shaped on the basis of the contextual characteristics, further developed as a dynamically evolved religiosity coping with the changing contexts of the Ottoman state and the modern Turkish Republic. In particular, many later sub-forms of Turkish Sufism came out as a

result of the reassessment of the frontier, tolerant, syncretistic and social characteristics to major social changes, characterizing the development of Turkish Sufism.

## 2.2. The development of Turkish Sufism (15c – 20c)

Ahmet Yaşar Ocak, the leading historian in the field, describes Sufism as “a very important dimension of Ottoman social history.” He further asserts that “The history of Sufism and spheres during the Ottoman times does not encompass just certain *tariqat* or *tekkes*, but almost all social classes, because Sufism influenced, in varying degrees and different ways, all of them, from their daily lives to their approaches to various events.”<sup>233</sup> Truly, despite many scholars’ examination of Ottoman Sufism with respect to *tariqa* activities, a careful look at the relevant sources reveals its much deeper layer that reaches to the kernel of the Turkish culture. Such a deep layer, since its foundation mostly by the early great Sufis, had been gradually systemized through its dynamic interaction with various social conditions.

Initially, Sufism, more correctly Turkified Sufism, played a formative role in the founding of the Ottoman state and the creation of Turko-Ottoman culture.<sup>234</sup> The Ottoman state began as a minor tribe of nomadic Turks in 1299, gained power with its capture of Bursa in 1326 and was firmly established by its conquest of Constantinople in 1453 that finalized the Turkic dominance of Anatolia. Sufis were actively involved in the state affairs during this time, having remarkably contributed to such areas as the Ottoman

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<sup>233</sup> Ocak, Introduction to *Sufism and Sufis in Ottoman Society*, xv.

<sup>234</sup> Yavuz, “Is There a Turkish Islam?,” 220.



conquest, the Turkification and Islamization of Anatolia, and the legitimization of the Ottoman rule.<sup>235</sup> As noted earlier, the role of the baba-Qalandar-bektashi tradition was of considerable importance due to its direct link to the imperial Janissary army both in the founding of the Janissary corps and by the active participation of the babas in frontier warfare. Though less scholarly noted, the individual roles of the early great Turkish Sufis such as Yasawi, Rumi and Emre cannot be dismissed. Certainly, they did not play such an apparent role as the babas marked. Yet, as the legends of the great Sufis acquired dominance, their influence became more visualized. Compared to the political and military role of the babas, they had a great impact on Ottoman religious cultural life. For instance, their proposed Islamic-centered Sufism functioned effectively for the Anatolian Islamization and further led to the development of Sunni orthodox Sufism. On the one hand, this orthodox Sufism was systemized in concord with the influx of Hanafi theologians and the establishment of *madrassa* during the fourteenth and the fifteenth centuries.<sup>236</sup> On the other hand, it strengthened the settlement of Sunni-orthodox elite culture in the Ottoman state. In this way, both the babas and the great Sufis helped shape the Ottoman political and cultural realms. In return for their support, the Sufis were ensured patronage by the state governors. Aşıkpaşazade's chronicle repeatedly notes that many Sufis acquired and settled new territories in the imperial conquest and, in return,

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<sup>235</sup> For a general overview of these areas that the Sufis, specially the babas, greatly contributed to, see, Ahmet Yaşar Ocak, "Osmanlı Devleti'nin Kuruluşunda Dervişlerin Rolü," in *Osmanlı Devleti'nin Kuruluşu: Efsaneler ve Gerçekler: Tartışma/panel Bildirileri* (Kızılay, Ankara: Imge Kitabevi. 2000), 67-80. Devleti'nin Kuruluşunda Dervişlerin Rolü," in *Osmanlı Devleti'nin Kuruluşu: Efsaneler ve Gerçekler: Tartışma/panel Bildirileri*,

<sup>236</sup> Köprülü, *İslam in Anatolia*, 28-9.

received lands, villages and endowments.<sup>237</sup> Because of this collaboration, Sufism flourished and exerted its political and cultural influence all through the Ottoman period. During this time, the elementary forms of Turkish Sufism were intensified and systemized remarkably through the evolving process of two interrelated factors, the rise of tariqas and the development of saint cults.

The active and deep engagement of Sufis in society since the beginning of the Ottoman state led to a gradual evolution of Sufi ideas and practices toward socialization and further institutionalization. During this process and soon after the conquest of Constantinople, new social institutions, tariqas, appeared. Tariqas came about through a social phenomenon in the fourteenth century that “the more strongly the Hanafi theologians exerted their power over the state, the political significance of the babas diminished.”<sup>238</sup> This phenomenon became prevalent in the following century, determining characteristic distinction and theological distance between the non-orthodox Sufi trend and the Sunni orthodox state. This gap eventually resulted in an antagonistic relationship and its consequent clashes between the two. The Sunni orthodox elites did not tolerate the non-orthodox Sufi movements that continued to infuse and diffuse the heretical Shii-batini beliefs into the populace, and thus, state repression followed. A notable clash was a large-scale socio-religious revolt provoked by Bedreddin (1416), the jurist and mystic whose doctrines of communal ownership and equality of property

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<sup>237</sup> See, Aşıkpaşazade and Ali Bey, *Tevarih-i Ali Osman'dan Aşıkpaşazade Tarihi* (Istanbul: Matbaa-yi Amire, 1914), 148-49, 201-02; cited from Vryonis, *The Decline of Medieval Hellenism*, 392.

<sup>238</sup> Köprülü, *Islam in Anatolia*, 28.

attracted many followers.<sup>239</sup> Concurrently, the orthodox Sunni Sufism, as the counterpart of the non-orthodox Sufism, came to be dominant.<sup>240</sup> Since then, these two Sufi trends occupied powerful dichotomous currents, bisecting the Ottoman Sufism.

It was in this tumultuous phase that a number of tariqas emerged. Paralleling to the diametrically opposite trends, the tariqas, whether imported or autogenous, underwent either heterodox or Sunni-orthodox directions.<sup>241</sup> Sufi orders like Bektashi, Bayrami (founded by Hacı Bayram Veli, d. 1429), Melami (found by Bursalı Ömer Dede (d.1475), one of the halife or the successor of Hacı Bayram Veli) and Hamzevi (established by a Bosnian shaykh, Hamza Baliya, d.1573) tariqas maintained the non-Sunni orthodox characteristics of the batini-Shii-Alevi affiliation. By contrast, other orders like Khalwatiyya (popularized in Anatolia under Yahya Shirwani, 1464) and Naqshbandiyya emerged in full consonance with the Shari'a as defined by the Hanafi ulama.<sup>242</sup> Among these orders, Bektashiyya and Naqshbandiyya imposed their own marks on Turkish Sufism as the most influential tariqas representing the two Sufi trends. As noted earlier, the Bektashi order appeared as an institutionalized form of the conglomeration of Hajii Bektash Veli's teachings and the existing non-Sunni tendencies in the fifteenth century. The order further advanced its heterodox nature under the influence of Balim Sultan, who

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<sup>239</sup> For a detail of his thought, see, Abdülbâki Gölpınarlı, *Melamilik ve Melamiler*, Gri Yayın, (Istanbul: Gri Yayın, 1992), 231-93; and for the revolt, see, Michel Balivet, *Şeyh Bedreddin Tasavvuf ve İsyan Tarih* (Vakfı Yurt Yayınları, 2000).

<sup>240</sup> Köprülü, *Islam in Anatolia*, 28.

<sup>241</sup> See, Ahmet Yaşar Ocak, "Islam in the Ottoman Empire: A Sociological Framework for a New Interpretation," *International Journal of Turkish Studies*, Vol. 9, 1-2 (summer 2003), 193.

<sup>242</sup> For a detail of the Ottoman Sufi orders, see, Necdet Yılmaz, *Osmanlı Toplumunda Tasavvuf: Sufiler, Devlet ve Ulema (XVII. yüzyıl)* (Istanbul: Osmanlı Araştırmaları Vakfı, 2001), 429-46.

innovated the existing system with many new doctrines and practices from various sources, Shii, batini, Alevi, Hurufi alike. The close tie with the Janissary corps enabled the order to diffuse its non-orthodox belief and practices through all classes of Ottoman society in both rural and urban areas. However, it was also due to this heterodox orientation that, over the course of time, the influence of Bektashiyya was gradually diminished and confined to the rural populace until its official closure in 1826. Naqshbandiyya emerged with features that differed markedly from those of Bektashiyya. Founded by Baha al-Din Naqshbandi al-Bukhari (d. 1389), the order greatly advanced under Imam Rabbani Ahmad al-Faruqi as-Sirhindi (regarded as *Mujadid Alf Thani* or “reviver of the second millennium,” d. 1624) to become an important factor in Indo-Muslim life.<sup>243</sup> In the fifteenth century, the Naqshbandiyya was brought into Turkish society by Molla Ilahi (d. 1419), the first Ottoman Naqshbandi who established the first Naqshbandi center and acquired a large number of devotees. The Naqshbandi order retained its distinctiveness through its adherence to Sunni-based, Shari’a-minded, sober, inward-looking and disciplinary spiritual practices. Thanks to this feature, the order was readily absorbed by Ottoman society.<sup>244</sup> As Şerif Mardin points out, confronted by the heterodox beliefs and practices of the Anatolian Turkic tribes from the thirteenth century onward, the Ottomans felt a necessity to integrate them with the Sunni orthodox Islam,

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<sup>243</sup> For a recent access to the life and thought of Ahmad Sirhindi, see, Yohanan Friedmann, *Shaykh Ahmad Sirhindi: An Outline of His Thought and a Study of His Image in the Eyes of Posterity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

<sup>244</sup> For a brief note on the distinctive features of the Naqshbandiyya, see, Hamid Algar, “The Naqshbandi Order: a Preliminary Survey of its History and Significance,” *Studia Islamica* 44 (1976), 123-52. On the distinctive features of the Ottoman Naqshbandiyya, see, Dina Le Gall. *A Culture of Sufism: Naqshbandis in the Ottoman World, 1450–1700* (Albany: State University of New York Press. 2005).

and found the Naqshbandiyya an excellent ally in achieving this goal.<sup>245</sup> The sympathetically prepared environment led to the successful implantation of the order into Ottoman society and its consequent expansion. In this context, the Ottoman Naqshbandiyya, with its emphatic Sunni identity and insistence on sober respect for the Shari'a, gained the loyalty of the Ottoman Turks. An entirely new era in the history of the Naqshbandiyya in Turkey began with the rise of the Khalidi branch in the first quarter of the nineteenth century. The Khalidi branch came about under the leadership of Mawlana Khalid Bagdadi (d. 1827). One of his goals was to reinforce the allegiance of the Ottoman state to the Shari'a and thus make it a viable focus for Muslim strength and unity. Before the emergence of the Khalidiyya, the Naqshbandis were certainly prominent and respected, but they never came close to enjoying the near-monopoly on Sufi activity that they exercised in Central Asia. The Khalidiyya, however, made the Naqshbandiyya the paramount order in Turkey, a position it has retained even after the official dissolution of the orders.<sup>246</sup>

Needless to say, the proliferation of tariqas as organized institutions played a great role in the systematic infusion of Sufism into Ottoman society.<sup>247</sup> However, a point must be made that it was not the tariqas alone, but also, perhaps more importantly, another form that accounted for the development of Turkish Sufism. This form is the

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<sup>245</sup> Şerif Mardin, "The Nakshibendi Order of Turkey," in *Fundamentalisms and the State: Remaking Politics, Economies and Militance*, eds. Martin Marty and R. Scott Appleby (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1993), 207.

<sup>246</sup> See, Hamid Algar, "The Naqshbandi Order: a Preliminary Survey of its History and Significance," 147-50.

<sup>247</sup> For a brief note on the role, see, Hans Kissling, "The Sociological and Educational Role of the Dervish Orders in the Ottoman Empire," *American Anthropologist Memoir*, 76 (1954): 23-35.

saint cults, a topic that has received little attention in academia compared to the tariqas.<sup>248</sup> Though it does not focus on the saint cults, Karamustafa's *God's Unruly Friends* makes some insightful points. Karamustafa defines the saint or *awliya* cult as "an ideological and ritual complex" compared to the tariqa as "a form of religious organization."<sup>249</sup> From this distinction, he argues that "the formation of institutional Sufism was not peculiar to the full-fledged development of tariqas. Sufism grew deeper institutional roots in society with the evolution of popular cults around the *awliya* or friends of God."<sup>250</sup> According to him, socialized Sufism was the result of the "unfolding of two closely related processes, the rise of the tariqa and the development of popular cults around the friends of God, the *awliya*."<sup>251</sup> Certainly, a close look at the history reveals a far-reaching process of the formation and development of the saint cults. Since the emergence of great Sufis such as Yasawi, Rumi, Emre and Bektash in the twelfth to the fourteenth centuries, their mystical thoughts and saintly lives had continually been remembered, circulated and reproduced to be a legendary cultural icon. This process continued for centuries, generating diverse

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<sup>248</sup> In his description of *tai'fa* as the third and final stage of the development of Sufism, Trimingham characterizes it as the popular Sufi movements with a tendency of 'surrender to a person' fully incorporated with the saint cults; Trimingham, 102-103. However, Karamustafa points out that this description "has the disadvantage of concealing the analytical distinction between the tariqa and the cult of saints; Karamustafa, *God's Unruly Friends: Dervish Groups in the Later Middle Period: 1200-1550* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1994), 134. It seems to me that Trimingham's ambiguous distinction of the two is due to his tariqa-focused and favored perspective, as he considers the association of the saint cult with the baba tradition as one of the reasons of the decline of Sufism; see, Trimingham, *The Sufi Orders in Islam*, 67-104. Likewise, the topic of the saint cult has been only occasionally mentioned almost exclusively in relation to the history of tariqa. In this academic context, two works on the topic provide pioneering and insightful perspective; Christopher S. Taylor, *The Cult of the Saints in Late Medieval Egypt*, Ph. D. diss. (Princeton University, 1989); and Vincent Cornell, *Mirrors of Prophethood: The Evolving Image of the Spiritual Master in the Western Maghrib from the Origins of Sufism to the End of the Sixteenth Century*. Ph. D. diss. (University of California, Los Angeles, 1989. 1991).

<sup>249</sup> Ahmed Karamustafa. *God's Unruly Friends*, 89

<sup>250</sup> Ibid, 89.

<sup>251</sup> Ibid, 87.

manifestations of the saint cults. The popular practices, most notably such as *sama* and *ilahi*, served as major means for the deepening and widening of the cults in society. Rumi's use of instrumental music and dance in the ceremony of *sama*, and the *ilahi* genre of hymns that originated with the poets of Yasawi, Emre and Bektash, provided fertile ground for the popularization of saint cults.<sup>252</sup> Through these cultural elements, the cult of saints penetrated Ottoman Muslim society and became an important part of Turkish religious culture. Because of this cultural orientation, the saint cult differed from tariqas in many important aspects. While the latter emerged as a result of the socially institutionalization of diverse Sufi trends, the former was shaped by the culturalization of Sufism. Further, there were many saint cults formed around Sufi saints without their affiliations to any tariqa, while there was no Sufi order without an association to a certain manifestation of saint cult. This is to say 'saint cult without tariqa but not vice versa.' The different orientations imposed different functions as well. While tariqas functioned as social instruments for the socialization of Sufism, saint cults were cultural mechanisms, which facilitated Sufism to be deeply embedded in the culture. Unlike tariqas, the cults of saints undertook the role without regard for the dichotomous heterodox and orthodox distinction. As Ocak puts it, the beliefs and practices of the saint cult were a common tradition among Sunnis, Alevis-Bektashis and Sufi circles.<sup>253</sup> At the same time, once formulated as an embedded culture, the saint cult was able to be at work relatively free from the political influence, in sharp contrast to the Sufi orders that bracketed with ups

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<sup>252</sup> For the development of *sama* and *ilahi* tradition in the Ottoman period, see, W. Feldman, "Musical Genres and Zikir of the Sunni Tarikats of Istanbul," in *The dervish Lodge: Architecture, Art, and Sufism in Ottoman Turkey*, ed. Raymond Lifchez (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 187-202.

<sup>253</sup> Ocak, "Islam in the Ottoman Empire," 186.

and downs according to the political circumstances. As a notable example, saintly charisma, the grounding element of the saint cults, continued to function for an empowerment of religious authority and became a major constituent of Turkish Sufism without regard for any political interventions and sectarian distinctions of religious movements.<sup>254</sup>

This renewed approach to saint cults raises a necessity for a reassessment of the academic trend that tends to attribute the development of Sufism exclusively to tariqa activities. It proves that both the socially proliferated tariqas and the culturally embedded saint cults came to function as two sides (e.g., social and cultural) of the same coin (e.g., Sufism) for the common goal of the dissemination of Sufism.<sup>255</sup> Since the fifteenth century when the ulama class and its related ‘state Islam’ became eminent, the Sufi orders and saint cult served as the major building blocks of ‘civil Islam.’ In contrast to state Islam that refers to the ulama’ legalistic interpretation of Islam for the Ottoman administration, civil Islam was represented by the Sufi orders and the saint cults that embraced the populace and was rooted in the public sphere. Having secured their funds primarily from *waqf* or the legal institutions of charitable endowments, the tariqas carried social services such as providing food, shelter, money and education to the people in need, while the saint cults promoted moral code and infused Sufi spirituality. Moreover, the two agencies of civil Islam played an intermediary role between the state and the society. They were the ‘transmission belts’ that functioned for communication between the state

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<sup>254</sup> The tradition of charisma will be discussed in detail in Chapter 5, as it is necessary to understand Gülen’s charismatic leadership of his movement.

<sup>255</sup> See, Karamustafa, *God’s Unruly Friends*, 89.



policies and the mass demands, and between the elite and the popular cultures.<sup>256</sup> In addition, saint cults and tariqas were at work as a binding force between urban and rural people, presenting Sufi doctrines and practices as a common, communicative and interactive element. In this way, Sufism became “the shield of society, the core of civil Islam,”<sup>257</sup> affecting every stratum of Ottoman society and culture.<sup>258</sup>

The indispensable position of Sufism to Ottoman society, however, was critically challenged when major social changes occurred in the last hundred years of the Ottoman Empire. The period from 1826 until 1925 framed a decisive shift of the mainstream of Sufism to its ebb. Having begun with the suppression of the Bektashi order in 1826, Sufi activities constantly shrank up to the abolition of all tariqas in 1925.

The decline of Sufism happened not as a one dimensional phenomenon but as a multi-faceted process proceeded by many factors, intertwining with the decline of the Ottoman Empire itself. In fact, there were too many involved factors to enumerate here. Nevertheless, it is possible to categorize the factors into two closely interconnected groups, external and internal factors. The external factors such as the rise of nationalism, military defeat, territorial losses and Western influence limited much of the Empire’s

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<sup>256</sup> For this role as a component of civil Islam, see, Şerif Mardin, “Some Notes on Normative Conflicts in Turkey,” in *The limits of Social Cohesion: Conflict and Mediation in Pluralist Societies: a Report of the Bertelsmann Foundation to the Club of Rome*, ed., Peter Berger (Boulder, Colo: Westview Press. 1998), 207-32.

<sup>257</sup> Yavuz, “Is there a Turkish Islam?,” 220.

<sup>258</sup> For instance, Osman Tuner notes the fact that “in 1834, during the final period of the Ottoman Empire, there were 209 tekkes in operation in Istanbul alone, 259 in 1840, 307 in 1889 and 254 in 1918,” and adduces it as a clear evidence for the dominant influence of the Sufi orders in socio-religious arenas; Osman Tuner, “General Distribution of the Sufi Orders in Ottoman Anatolia,” in *Sufism and Sufis in Ottoman Society: Sources-Doctrines-Rituals-Turuq-Architecture, Literature and Fine Arts*, ed., Yaşar Ocak (Ankara: 2005), 254.

sovereignty and induced many far-reaching consequences. The imposed changes were brought about by the modernization process, which was initiated by Mahmud II (r. 1808-1839) and continued through the *Tanzimat* period (a Turkish term for ‘Reorganization’; 1839-1875) and the two Constitutional Eras (The First Constitutional Era or *Birinci Meşrutiyet Dönemi*; 1876-1878 and the Second Constitutional Era or *İkinci Meşrutiyet Dönemi*; 1908-1920). This process determined much of the reorganization and transformation of the Empire’s structures, including the changes of the state policy on Sufism that drastically caused the decline of Sufism. By far the most damaging measure was the reorganization of the state’s revenues and its economic impact on Sufi activities. The newly established *Evkaf* Ministry or ‘A Ministry for Imperial Religious Foundations’ supervised religious endowments throughout the empire.<sup>259</sup> Likewise, these factors restricted determinately the social activities of Sufism. Simultaneously, the factors caused an internal re-evaluation of the religious value of Sufism. The fact that the great Islamic Ottoman Empire was defeated by the infidel Christian West led ulama, intellectuals and state elites to engage in the delicate and conflictual discourse that the weakness of the Empire is a sign of the regression of Islam. The decision that followed was to change religious fields, which divested the reform process with a ‘religious’ aspect.’ Thereby, Sufism became a target of condemnation as a reason, if not *the* reason, of the Empire’s decadence and Islamic decline. In particular, the features of Sufism such as individuality, passivity and other-worldly orientation were highlighted and most severely criticized as the origin of social and moral vices like laziness, superstition, abasement and poverty as

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<sup>259</sup> For a detailed discussion of the Imperial *Evkaf* Ministry, see, John Robert Barnes, *An Introduction to the Religious Foundations in the Ottoman Empire* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1986), 102-117.

opposed to Islamic dignity, diligence and enthusiasm. To this extent, the concepts such as *Wahdat Wujud* and *Insan-i Kamil* were disapproved of as the theological basis of those degrading features, which weakened and destroyed Islamic doctrines. This anti-Sufi criticism resulted in the establishments of state control mechanisms over Sufi activities, notably, the institutionalization of the Council of Shaykhs in 1866. Put simply, both the external circumstances of the Empire and the subsequent criticism led to the decline of Sufism. One of the earliest and most noticeable cases of the imminent decline was the closing of the Bektashi order. The order's close tie with the Janissary corps, which had preserved its privileged dominance despite its non-orthodox nature, became the very reason of its official ban in 1826. One of the first constitutional reforms of the modernizing project was the replacement of the traditional military system of the elite janissary corps with a modernized conscripted army. To dismantle completely the existing corps, it was necessary to cut down its tie with the Bektashiyya, the spiritual sustainer and popular supporter of the corps, as such the order was outlawed.<sup>260</sup> With the banning of the order, its properties were handed over to the Naqshbandiyya, increasing the state's centralizing control over the religious orders and the anti-Sufi sentiments against the whole of Sufism.<sup>261</sup>

Although some orders were still active and even proliferated in a certain time,<sup>262</sup> the overwhelming mood of decline continued. In particular, the social foundations of

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<sup>260</sup> Bernard Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968; 2d ed.), 78-80.

<sup>261</sup> Ismail Kara, "Sufi Orders in Contemporary Thought," 570. For a detail, see, Barnes, *An Introduction to the Religious Foundations*, 87-101.

<sup>262</sup> Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey*, 408-9.

Sufism, both the non-orthodox and orthodox movements, became increasingly unstable with a significant negative impact on Sufism as a whole. The decline of Sufism reached its lowest point with the Kemalist Revolution and the founding of the Republic in 1923. On the basis of its two foundational ideological principles, secularism and nationalism, the law of September 1925 outlawed Sufism with a statement that “from this day forth, there are not *tarikats*, or *dervishes*, and *murids* belonging to them, within the boundaries of the Turkish Republic.”<sup>263</sup> Consequently, all Sufi gatherings, practices and teachings were banned.

In many ways, the decline of Ottoman Sufism reflects and reacts to the claims of the decline theorists that I discussed in the previous chapter. At first sight, it seems that in a way of justifying the latter, the former happened, more correctly was forced by, during the process of the Ottoman modernization and secularization. In a broad sense, similar to the Durkhemian functionalist theory in the field, the modernization brought about the gradual loss of the social foundations of the Ottoman Sufism as well as its social, economic and educational functions. Corresponding to the proclaimed Weberian rationalization, Ottoman Sufism also, to a certain degree, failed to satisfy new rational inquiry imposed by the modernized reformers. A careful look, however, makes notable and noticeable of the discrepancies between the intrinsic reasons of the decline and the academic theories. The discrepancies result from the different perceptions of Ottoman Sufism that diversely manifested in between the non-orthodox and the Sunni-orthodox traditions. In fact, it is some of non-orthodox Sufi manifestations that can be an actual

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<sup>263</sup> Hamid Algar, “The Naqshbandi Order in Republican Turkey,” *Islam World Report: Turkey: The Pendulum Swings Back* 1/3 (1994), 55.

object of the proclaimed incompatibility of Sufism with modernization. The exaggerated fatalism, passivity and heretical practices were the characteristics of some deviant Sufis.<sup>264</sup> By contrast, Sunni-orthodox Sufism and its related orders marked its continuance of diffusion during the modernization period until the founding of Kemalist Republic that outlawed all Sufi movements and practices homogenously and uniformly. This fact indicates two important aspects that contradict the decline theory. Apparently, the Kemalist ban counters with the alleged ‘religious aspect’ of the reforms, which put diverse Sufi trends into a simplified and homogenized criticism. The reformers’ criticism that dismissed diverse Sufi manifestations, as a recent scholar argues, was a by-product of the then social milieu, which the orientalist view of Islam played a role of a primary reference in the modern Turkish thought.<sup>265</sup> The wholesale criticism against Sufism *in toto* further implies that the Sufi decline did not happen in essence as a religious and/or cultural phenomenon but was the result of political and contextual consequence. In fact, history shows that despite the traditionally close relationship of many Sufis with the Ottoman sultanate, many a little of the Sufi rebellions against the empire cumulated enough to produce the political anti-Sufi reaction. The sentiment of the potential political rivalry of Sufism was further linked to the wholesale criticism of the reformist politicians. Even, the prominent orders like Naqshbandiyya were accused when they became deeply involved in the political activities. Given these facts, it would be misleading to attribute the ‘religious aspect’ of Sufism as a whole to the primary factor of the Sufi decline. On the contrary, the oppressive political climate was the primary factor that caused the

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<sup>264</sup> For a detailed account of deviant individual Sufis, see, Karamustafa, *God’s Unruly Friends*.

<sup>265</sup> Kara, “Sufi Orders in Contemporary Thought,” 551.

decline of Sufism *in toto*.<sup>266</sup> Turkish Sufism was certainly on the decline, but, contrary to the prediction of the decline theorists, it has never been moribund even by the severe political attacks and the legitimated ban. The basic ‘religious’ characteristics of Turkish Sufism such as dynamicity, sociality and tolerance have been inclusively at work in perpetuating Turkish Sufism amidst the contextual turmoil of the late Ottoman period and the founding of the Turkish Republic.

Contrary to the claims of the decline theorists,<sup>267</sup> many Sufis and the Sufi movements during this period did not resist the process of modernization and secularization, but accommodated to them by utilizing the traditional characteristics of Turkish Sufism. Ismail Kara’s “Sufi Orders in Contemporary Thought” offers the anatomy of Sufi response and survival in the transition from the Ottoman state to the Turkish Republic. According to Kara, “Sufi spheres related to religious orders were taking seriously the sentiments of their times and were trying to change into entities more in harmony with their opponents’ requirements, both in mentality and practice.”<sup>268</sup> As opposite to the wholesale criticism against Sufism that heavily relied on the ignorant and deviant Sufis, there was a considerable number of Sufis who reconciled their mystical

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<sup>266</sup> Trimingham also considers the decline process as the political phenomenon. According to him, the decline process of Sufism in Turkey “was accelerated since the orders became a direct object of attack by the secularizing movement, being regarded as something not merely decadent, but politically reactionary and dangerous”; Trimingham, *The Sufi Orders in Islam*, 253.

<sup>267</sup> For a representative voice of the theorists’ claim, see, Trimingham’s discussion of Sufism in Turkish context, which concludes that “the orders in many parts of the Turkish empire had been attacked on religious and moral as well as political and partisan grounds, yet they were not thereby stimulated either to undertake real reform or to manifest new life.” Thus, “the abolition of the orders in Turkey proved decisive and they are not likely to play a major religious and social role again.” Trimingham, *The Sufi Orders in Islam*, 253-54.

<sup>268</sup> Kara, “Sufi Orders in Contemporary Thought,” 571.

ideas with reason and logic with the educational background of *madrasa*.<sup>269</sup> The author further considers “the fact that almost all religious orders had attributed importance to studies in medresses” as a Sufi response to the modernization and the criticism.<sup>270</sup> To Kara, “the medresses and tekkes were perfectly capable of maintaining their vitality within their own logic and internal dynamics, and what is more important were capable of renewing themselves” in the face of the challenging conditions.<sup>271</sup> This illustrates the dynamic interaction of the Sufis with the multi-faceted challenges imposed by modernity, Western rationalism and Muslim criticism.

Given this response of the Sufis to modernity, it is of particular relevance to figure out how it corresponds to the concept of ‘neo-Sufism.’ As discussed in the previous chapter, neo-Sufism as the hotly debated concept in modern academia denotes a ‘new’ style of Sufism that arose in reaction to the reform tendency during the late eighteenth and the early twentieth century, characterized by a revivalist and reformed Sufism of more Shari’a-minded, less ecstatic nature and active involvement in worldly affairs. Without repeating the length of the debate, Turkish Sufi response to the context of reform does not correspond to this description of neo-Sufism. Rather, it marked its own distinctive situation of Sufism. Above all, the Turkish case refutes the proclaimed ‘new’ characteristics of neo-Sufism, which emphasize the innovation from and the discontinuity with pre-existent Sufi tradition. The Turkish form of the more Shari’a-minded and less ecstatic Sufism was by no means new. It has existed since its early years, deeply rooted in

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<sup>269</sup> Ibid, 571.

<sup>270</sup> Ibid, 571.

<sup>271</sup> Ibid, 547.

consonance with the Sunni-orthodox religiosity of the Ottoman Empire. As highlighted so far, sociality is also not an innovation but a building block of Turkish Sufism coinciding with the frontier context. Nevertheless, the Turkish Sufi response to modernity corresponds to the most important implication of neo-Sufism, that is, the dynamicity of Sufism. Not only was the Turkish response distinctive from those of other Islamic regions, but also did the modernity and the decline of Sufism induce changes of the Sufi manifestations from the traditional Sufi framework. It followed transformation and reformulation of the traditional Sufi garbs into new contemporary forms on the basis of the perpetual characteristics of Turkish Sufism. Throughout this process emerged diverse manifestations, leading to the resurgence of Sufism and charactering contemporary Turkish Sufism.

### 2.3. Contemporary manifestation (20c – present)

The illegalization of tariqas by the secularist republic reinforced the strict control over the Sufi practices, which operated most seriously during the Republican period until 1946. The decline process of Sufism was thus accelerated at a significant level through the stern restriction of visible activities of the Sufi orders. Yet, contrary to the expectation of the republicans and no matter how efficient their control was, the secularist suppression and intimidation were not as fatal as to bring about the end of Sufism *in toto*. Like its past, neither then nor later has Turkish Sufism ever lost its dominant and peculiar place in the inner, religio-cultural lives of Turks. For this reason, since 1950's when the government restriction was relaxed, Sufism has re-appeared in public space with such



vigor to be called ‘the resurgence of Sufism.’ The re-appearance occurred along with the ubiquitous phenomenon of Sufi resurgence around the world. Yet, just as different contexts lead to different manifestations, the Turkish Sufi resurgence shows its distinctive picture. The contemporary context with its rapid shift toward globalization, pluralization, desecularization and post-materialism, has no doubt given birth to the ‘new’ Sufi manifestations. These manifestations are ‘new,’ however, only in ‘outward appearances’ of Turkish Sufism. The grounding characteristics of Turkish Sufism, e.g., dynamicity, sociality and tolerance, still exist inside the outer changes. Sufis employed these characteristics in their interaction with the contemporary context, and on this basis, formed new religious ideas and structures. As a result, various manifestations as revived and renewed appearances of the classic Sufi characteristics generated, and in this way, Turkish Sufism was rehabilitated in public spheres. The reach of the resurgence of Sufism with its diverse manifestations can be limited by neither a certain location nor a specific reason. Sufism resurged with many reasons in all social domains of the contemporary Turkey. The following remarks highlight the four most prominent manifestations of contemporary Turkish Sufism, delineating the general picture of the resurgence with its peculiar characteristics.

Scholars are in consensus that the revival of Sufism is most noticeable in the Turkish cultural sphere. In reality, the current cultural manifestation did not newly appear, as it never truly disappeared. From the early Ottoman Anatolia onward, as Papas asserts, “Sufism represented the most popular model of pious life and as such influenced deeply the behaviors, ethical commitments, and modes of thought among the masses; indeed, the influence of Sufism reached proportions that we can hardly imagine today, eighty years

after the ban of the Sufi brotherhoods by Mustafa Kemal in 1925.”<sup>272</sup> Similarly, Lifchez notes that “unlike the dervish orders, dervish culture was not a deviant body within the mainstream of Ottoman Islam but a self-selected aspect of Muslim life that was almost as old as Islam itself. The roots of Sufism were deeply embedded in the Islamic history of the Turkish people and the Ottoman state.”<sup>273</sup> That is, together with Islam, Sufism has constituted the religio-cultural identity of Turkishness. Compared to the Sufi social organizations typically represented by tariqas, Sufism as a culture has been little affected by, but more and more deepened through, the changing context. From this perspective of ‘cultural Sufism,’ it would be inappropriate, strictly speaking, to talk about the cultural decline or resurgence of Turkish Sufism. Rather, it is more proper to speak of tangible or intangible manifestations of cultural Sufism. In the contemporary context, Sufism became clearly tangible in the culture spheres. In particular, when the agenda of the Kemalist secular state countered Islamist fundamentalism with the mystical and moral doctrine of Sufi universalism, the cultural aspects of Sufism were reassessed to the major changes in which culture intervened. By far importantly, in the contemporary Turkey that marked the rise of nationalism and the global interactions, Sufism was considered one of the foundations of Turkish national and international identity. On the one hand, many Turks began to articulate their prepared global identity on the basis of the Sufi tradition of love-based and tolerant-oriented universality. On the other hand, the Sufi cultural elements enabled them to make distinctions of their lifestyle from others. Mainly for these reasons,

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<sup>272</sup> Papas, “Toward a New History of Sufism,” 86.

<sup>273</sup> Raymond Lifchez, Introduction to *The dervish Lodge: Architecture, Art, and Sufism in Ottoman Turkey*, ed. Raymond Lifchez (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 5-6.

Sufism became clearly visible in the cultural domains. Truly, as Kafadar concedes, the effects of Sufism on Turkish culture are extremely difficult to gauge, because of the less formalized Sufi traditions.<sup>274</sup> However, a renewed interest in and reassessment of the cultural heritage of Sufism led to an examination of the cultural elements of Sufism.<sup>275</sup> Among the identified elements are the everyday use of idioms from the Sufi expressions, national songs from the Sufi *ilahi* tradition, and popular poems from the *asik* poetry tradition that drawing heavily from Bektashi-colored drifter Sufism, had bridged rural and urban societies in the Ottoman era.<sup>276</sup> Though more research is necessary, these daily manifestations of the Sufi-oriented culture suffice to note that far from being esoterica for the Sufis, Sufism is an ordinary fact for Turks, representing itself as a way of life.

The resurgence of Sufism as a social organization is a striking feature of contemporary Turkish Sufism. From the second half of the twentieth century onwards, Sufism has regained its socially organized forms, but in quite different ways from the tariqa tradition. Significant changes occurred in the manifestation of the Sufi orders, which was dramatically transformed from the traditional tariqas toward new institutional forms. Initially, this transformation was imposed with the slogan of ‘no longer tariqa and tekkes’ that was widespread by the secularist directive against the Sufi orders and the consequent negative image of tariqas and tekkes among the populace. The ban of the traditional tariqas caused to cut down an intermediary social role of the tariqas, which

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<sup>274</sup> Kafadar, “The New Visibility of Sufism in Turkish Studies and Cultural Life,” 314.

<sup>275</sup> For a representative study on the cultural heritage of a Sufi order, see, Le Gall. *A Culture of Sufism*. This study emphasizes the cultural and organizational patterns of the Ottoman Naqshbandiyya, which appeared as instruments of cultural transmission and integration.

<sup>276</sup> Kafadar, “The New Visibility of Sufism in Turkish Studies and Cultural Life,” 314-5. See also, Köprülü, *Early Mystics in Turkish Literature*, 367-8.

had represented civil Islam, the transmission belt between the state and the society. The Kemalist policy of de-Islamization tried to force civil Islam out of the public sphere, especially by replacing the tariqa organizations with secular institutions such as the People's Houses and the Village Institutes.<sup>277</sup> This strategy was not effective, as it failed to create a new ethical-social system to take the place of the *adab* tradition that offered by civil Islam and the Sufi orders throughout the Ottoman Empire. Literally meaning "right path for any official or private sector," *adab* served as a constitution of Ottoman society by ensuring social equilibrium and providing an ethical basis for personal relations.<sup>278</sup> For this reason, the secularist effort to replace the long standing tradition of civil Islam and *adab* was doomed to failure. This failure in turn delegitimized the Republican reforms and generated tension between the state and the society, and the Kemalist imposition of social change was never fully internalized by the masses. As a consequence and concomitant with rapid migration and urbanization of the 1950s and 1960s, civil Islam re-emerged with different formal structures and institutions of Sufism. In other words, the Sufi orders reappeared as popular religious movements but in contemporary forms and with distinctive characteristics.<sup>279</sup> These new institutions recovered the traditional role of civil Islam, decreasing the distinctions between the state and the society and furthering the social consolidation of Islamic identity. In this way, they continued to represent civil Islam with their increasingly focus on belief instead of practice and by

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<sup>277</sup> Hakan Yavuz, *Islamic Political Identity in Turkey*, 54 and 285-86.

<sup>278</sup> Mardin, "Some Notes on Normative Conflicts in Turkey," 213 and 231.

<sup>279</sup> Şerif Mardin, *Religion and Social Change in Modern Turkey: The Case of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1989), 230.

adopting an evolutionary and not a revolutionary approach as far as the Islamization of everyday life is concerned. In this way, the movements were able to escape from both the popularized negative image of the tariqas and the secularist consideration of them as an obstacle against reforms. The contemporary Sufi branches of Qadiri and Naqshi are good examples of these new movements, as they built their institutions on classical Sufi doctrines with inclusion of new trends arising from interaction with their social context.

Contemporary academia, which examined the rise of new Sufi institutions in various Islamic countries, has coined the terms such as ‘neo-tariqas’ and ‘neo-Sufi organizations.’ The common prefix ‘neo’ indicates ‘new,’ implying different characteristics and a discontinuity from the past Sufi tradition. Although some specialists on Turkish Sufism tend to employ these terms, they are not appropriate to contemporary Turkish Sufi institutions. The tradition of the socially engaged Sufism points to its intrinsic and organic connection to the institutions. As discussed earlier, the socially engaged Sufism was formulated by the active engagement of the early Sufis in the frontier context, and since then, it has been a major determinant in Turkish social and cultural life. This tradition was manifest in diverse civil organizations, including the tariqas. Apart from the tariqas, there were “many Sufi congregations that did not depend on a central organization and continued to function as independent cells by keeping within certain limits of secrecy and by exploring selective ties of allegiance with members of the police, the military, and the parliament.”<sup>280</sup> There were also many Sufi associations tied with other social institutions such as the traditional *futuwwa-akhi*

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<sup>280</sup> Kafadar, “The New Visibility of Sufism in Turkish Studies and Cultural Life,” 310.

organizations and modern veritable business sects. These organizations of Sufism resurged in the contemporary context, where, as Kafadar describes, the modern orders became too degenerate to represent the original spirit of organized Sufism that was still alive and even recognized despite the state oppression.<sup>281</sup> The revival of these organizations, which indicates the continuity of the Sufi tradition, withstands use of the terms with the prefix ‘neo.’ It might be advisable to coin an appropriate term for contemporary Turkish Sufi institutions. A term ‘Sufi-associated civil organizations’ may be worthy of consideration.

According to many scholars, the best representative of the civil organizations is the Nurcu movement, which was inspired by Bediüzzaman Said Nursi (d. 1960). Nursi led an autonomous organization within the Khalidi Naqshbandi order during the Republican Era. Although he engaged in some political activities during World War I and against the secular Kemalism in his early life, Nursi later turned to and focused on the spiritual aspects of Islam. His teaching of the Islamic spirituality is well preserved in his stamping treatise *Risale-i Nur* (the Epistle of Light), an esoteric commentary on the Qur’an that has a mystical flavor within an atmosphere of rationalism. The *Risale-i Nur* inspired a group of provisional intellectuals who set up a network, which later gave birth to ‘the Nurcu movements.’<sup>282</sup>

While many civil organizations of Sufism kept their distance from politics, other organizations appeared to be stimulating increased participation in politics. Of particular

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<sup>281</sup> Ibid, 317.

<sup>282</sup> Mardin, *Religion and Social Change in Modern Turkey*, 36-7.

interest is the remarkable resurfacing of a Naqshi branch.<sup>283</sup> In the first half of the twentieth century, the Naqshbandis found themselves denied all legitimacy under the dispensation brought in by the Kemalist Republic. In this context, a number of prominent leaders of the Naqshbandi order came out. Among them, Mehmet Zaid Koktu (d. 1980) can be single out for mention because of the size and nature of his followers and the prolongation of their political line to the present. Like Said Nursi, Koktu was a successor of the Khalidiyya.<sup>284</sup> Unlike Nursi, however, Koktu did not turn away from the politics, instead, considered it a significant reality with respect to Islam and developed a system of political Islamic thought. Eventually, Koktu became widely regarded as the founder of political Islam in modern Turkey. The influence of Koktu has been so profound as to determine, to a certain degree, the contour of contemporary Turkish politics. His influential circle includes Necmedin Erbakan who established the first Islamic party, the Party of National Salvation (*Milli Selamet Partisi*), Hasan Aksay, Fehmi Adak, Korkut Ozal, and Tayyip Erdogan. Today, Koktu's thought of political Islam continues to exert its influence through the media, the daily newspaper Sabah, and through many intellectuals including his successor Mahmud Esad Cohan.

Last but not least, the expansion of Turkish Sufism around the world is another significant manifestation. In consonance with the current of globalization, a good number of Turkish Sufi movements expanded their activities across the world, having established many sub-institutions there. Today, one readily observes Turkish Sufi movements in Western Europe, Australia and USA. The foundational characteristics of Turkish Sufism

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<sup>283</sup> See, Hakan Yavuz, *Islamic Political Identity in Turkey*, 133-150.

<sup>284</sup> *Ibid*, 141.

as discussed so far make it possible to identify some prominent reasons for these global manifestations. Above all, Turkish Sufism provides the cultural identity of Turkishness to the diaspora communities, as it acts as a link between ‘transplanted’ Sufi networks from the home country and Turkish immigrant communities.<sup>285</sup> In addition, the cultural elements of Turkish Sufism augment an interest of non-Muslims in Turkish oriental culture. A notable example is the *sama*. With its mystical and cultural feature that encounters with the secularized and materialized world, the *sama* has continually attracted a great many people over the globe, serving as a primary means of a civilized cultural exchange and becoming a hallmark of Turkish Sufism in particular and Sufism in general. Less noticeable though, the humanistic and universal aspects of Turkish Sufism correspond to the globalizing and the glocalizing context, providing ideological and religious grounds for the dialogic interaction of Turkish Sufis with the global citizens of diverse religious, cultural and ethnic backgrounds. In this sense, Rumi’s humanistic ideal of tolerance and Emre’s universal love have been reassessed as a part of popular discourse among Turks, who perceive them as the religio-cultural foundation of Turkishness. Prominently by these three factors, Turkish Sufism appears as global Sufism.

This chapter examined Turkish Sufism, tracing back its history. As aimed, it foregrounded a necessary context to place Gülen’s Sufism, remarking the following point. Sufism is not a homogenous discipline but a divergent and evolving religious system coping with wide-ranging social, political and cultural conditions. This dynamic nature of Sufism generates various manifestations. As a part of dynamic Sufism, Turkish Sufism

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<sup>285</sup> See, Ozay Mehmet, *Islamic Identity and Development: Studies of the Islamic Periphery* (London and New York: Routledge, 1990), 124.



marks its own distinctive characteristics. It was formed in the frontier with syncretistic and tolerant features, later on developed as a cultural entity, and manifests itself diversely in the contemporary context by transforming its traditional characteristics into revived and renewed religious ideas and structures.

## CHAPTER 3

### SUFISM IN GÜLEN'S LIFE

Sufism is the spiritual life of Islam. Those who represent Islam according to the way of the Prophet and his Companions have never stepped outside this line... As a lifestyle, Sufism was practiced at the most sublime level during the Age of Happiness, the Time of the Prophet and the Four Caliphs, upon them be peace and blessings.- Fethullah Gülen<sup>286</sup>

Fethullah Gülen, as respected by the honorific title *Hocaefendi* (respected teacher), is one of the most influential Muslim intellectuals in contemporary Turkey. Over the past forty years, Gülen's name has gained prominence in the daily language of Turkey over the role of Islam in state and society. His distinctive advocacy for Turkish Islamic identity inspired many Turks and invoked a series of social activities. Once begun with a small circle that crystallized around Gülen in the 1970s, the communal activities of his followers rapidly and significantly grew up as a mass educational movement, which has been called with different names such as *Nurcular* (followers of Nursi), *Fethullacilar* (followers of Fethullah Gülen), *hareket* (movement), *cemaat* (community) and *hizmet* (service) in Turkish and is today internationally known as the Gülen Movement. Despite the frequent political accusations against him and his movement, Gülen's Islamic ideals of tolerance and dialogue invigorated the movement to become a major civic organization that promotes education and interfaith/intercultural dialogue. Since then, the movement has never lost its prominent place in Turkey as the most influential civil organization, which extends its institutional activities into many public sector realms in Turkey including media, schools, finance companies, bookstores and publishing houses. In

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<sup>286</sup> Fethullah Gülen, *Toward a Global Civilization of Love and Tolerance*, (New Jersey: Light, 2004), 166.

particular, the last 10 years have witnessed the expansion of the movement onto the globe in tune with Gülen's liberal and global perspective. Today, this movement of some six million members stretches worldwide through its educational network of hundreds of schools and expands its dialogue activities over the world with its cultural institutions and inter-religious dialogue platforms.<sup>287</sup>

As the movement has marked its distinctive and important place in Turkey and later surged as a global organization, its religious identity and Gülen's vision of Islam continue to receive a considerable amount of public attention and has become the subject of numerous academic works in its native Turkey and the West. The political and social implications of the movement's activities have been dealt with in a good number of scholarly works, most of which underline explicitly and implicitly the Sufi tendencies of Gülen. A glimpse at this research, however, reveals that the Sufi aspects and elements of Gülen and his movement were examined with an angle narrowly-confined to political context. A closer look further points out a trend of the academic discourse up to the year of 2000, in which Gülen and the movement are either associated with a tariqa or defended as a non-tariqa orientation. Having failed to provide its necessary justification, this discourse became, in Yavuz's description, "a tendency in the usage of secularist Turks promiscuously to designate virtually any organized Islamic groups as a tariqa."<sup>288</sup> As a result, this trend has prevented access to the intrinsic Sufi dimension of Gülen's thought, causing the issue to remain pejorative as well as vague. Undoubtedly, there is a scholarly agreement that Sufism is a significant element in Gülen's personality and thought.

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<sup>287</sup> Marcia Hermansen, "Understandings of 'Community' within the Gülen Movement."

<sup>288</sup> Hakan Yavuz, *Islamic Political Identity in Turkey*, 181.

Although this agreement remained tacit due to the involved political impact on studies at issue, it has recently drawn sufficient academic attention.

Since the beginning of 2000, a more academic-oriented and a less biased attention has been paid to the Sufi aspects of Gülen and his movement. Counter to this dominant discourse, a number of specialists note the significance of examination on Gülen in his real context, not in that shallow one of political consultancy and ends. They put forward the context of Gülen's mystical dimension by contending that it "serves to prevent the hijacking of his thought for narrow political - democratic or otherwise - ends."<sup>289</sup> From this new approach came several works that readdress the Sufi dimension of Gülen and his movement. A representative study is a volume of *Turkish Islam and the secular state: The Gülen Movement*, which amplifies the formative role of Sufi tradition in the movement and its significant permutations.<sup>290</sup> In particular, Zeki Sarıtoprak's contribution to this study is inspiring, as it makes salient, for the first time in academia, Gülen's Sufi tendencies with respect to traditional categories of Sufism.<sup>291</sup> In light of this study, Thomas Michel further clarifies the Sufi-orientation of Gülen's teachings especially in the educational activities of the Gülen movement.<sup>292</sup> Enes Ergene's recent work also delineates several Sufi elements at the center of Gülen's thought and his

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<sup>289</sup> Jane Schlubach, "Tolerance Is Love: Gülen, Ghazali, and Rumi," paper presented at the conference, *Islam in the Contemporary World: The Fethullah Gülen Movement in Thought and Practice*, (Rice University, 2005). Available online at [en.fgulen.com](http://en.fgulen.com).

<sup>290</sup> Yavuz and Esposito (eds.), *Turkish Islam and the secular state: The Gülen Movement*.

<sup>291</sup> Sarıtoprak, "Fethullah Gülen: A Sufi in His Own Way."

<sup>292</sup> Thomas Michel, "Sufism and Modernity in the Thought of Fethullah Gülen," *The Muslim World* 95/3 (2005). 341-358.

movement.<sup>293</sup> These and other studies have contributed to an identification of the Sufi dimension of Gülen's thought, shedding light on its significance. As these studies indicate, however, there is an increasing demand for research, which specializes in Gülen's Sufism, identifies its untouched aspects and applies them to understanding the Gülen movement and its related issues such as contemporary phenomena of Islamic and Sufi resurgence and changing modality of Sufi manifestation and Islamic experience.

In this context, the present chapter attempts to assess the impact of Sufism in Gülen's life. Toward this end, I will trace his life, identifying how the Sufi environment led him to a conviction of Turkish Sufism and how the conviction in turn manifests in his lifestyle. One of the main difficulties in this examination is the lack of scholarly biographical research on Gülen's life. The only available source is an unfinished interview about his life, entitled *Küçük Dünyam* ("My Small World").<sup>294</sup> Together with this source, however, scattered information in the numerous writings of and on Gülen, the official websites dedicated to him and the published interviews with him enables me to analyze his life from the perspective of Sufism. In this analysis, I will identify Sufi elements that shaped Gülen's personal background, illuminating how deeply Sufism formed his life as indispensably as the above opening word of this chapter indicates.

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<sup>293</sup> Enes Ergene, *Geleneğin Modern Çağa Tanıklığı* [Tradition Bears Witness to the Modern Age] (Istanbul: Yeni Akademi Yay., 2005).

<sup>294</sup> Latif Erdoğan. *Fethullah Gülen Hocaefendi: Küçük Dünyam* [My Small World] (Istanbul: AD Yayıncılık A.Ş., 1995).

### 3. 1. Sufism in Gülen's life career

#### *Growing environment and early education: 1941-1958*

Fethullah Gülen was born in April 27, 1941 in Pasinler, a small Anatolian village of Korucuk, Erzurum Province in eastern Turkey.<sup>295</sup> Gülen recalls that this countryside environment gave him considerable spiritual fervor and a deeper spiritual atmosphere.<sup>296</sup> The geographical environment and regional culture that constituted the institution of his family and raised him up had no doubt become a molding soil for his personality, Islamic worldview and approach to Sufism. In a broad sense, he was a born-child of eastern Anatolia, in which Islamic manifestation was differentiated by its nationalistic and Sufi characteristics. More narrowly, two regions of eastern Anatolia, Ahlat and Erzurum, directly impacted Gülen's perception of Islam.

Ahlat, where Gülen's ancestors came from, locates in Bitlis province in eastern Turkey. In Gülen's own evaluation, Bitlis is an honored place in the Islamic history of Anatolia, where the grandchildren of the Prophet had settled and established certain spiritual ways, and where "the Turkish tribes and Islamic spirit first mingled and fused."<sup>297</sup> Gülen specifically notes that in this region the settlement of Seljuks in Anatolia followed the emergence of prominent tariqa branches like followers of Abdul-Qadir

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<sup>295</sup> Along with Erdoğan's *Küçük Dünyam*, Ünal and Williams's *Advocate of Dialogue* also gives a brief but useful biographical information about Gülen's life; see, 1-41.

<sup>296</sup> Fethullah Gülen, *Zamanın Altın Dilimi* [The Golden Piece of Time] (Izmir, 1994), 37-42.

<sup>297</sup> Ünal and Williams, *Advocate of Dialogue*, 9.

Gilani (d. 1166), under which a lineage of descendants of the Prophet Muhammad “blossomed like snow flowers.”<sup>298</sup> Due to its geographical condition of hard accessibility with mountains and valleys, Gülen goes on describing, Bitlis and Ahlat could preserve its tradition of Islamic spirituality that would eventually host the settlement of Said Nursi’s predecessors.<sup>299</sup> Since then, Bitlis and Ahlat have remained regions of spiritual pursuit and pervasiveness. Having inherited this regional heritage, Gülen’s ancestors came to Erzurum, the birth and growing place of Gülen. Erzurum is known for its remarkable tradition of frontier culture due to its location between Russia, Iran and Ottoman Turkey. According to Yavuz, the frontier culture of Erzurum upholds a nationalistic and state-centric orientation, which is imbued with its unique *dadaş* culture.<sup>300</sup> *Dadaş*, which connotes Turkish traditional popular virtues like honor, generosity, manliness and loyalty, became an Erzurum’s regional identity that “stresses community and security over other concerns.”<sup>301</sup> People of Erzurum tend to keep a close relationship with state on the one hand and hold Islam conservatively on the other.<sup>302</sup> In this context, the harmonious synthesis between nationalism and Islam was a main concern to have developed a unique regional understanding of Islam. Furthermore, its frontier location and role as an urban center of eastern Anatolia gave birth to a trend of sober Sufism in the respectable

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<sup>298</sup> Erdoğan, *Küçük Dünyam*, 13.

<sup>299</sup> Ibid.

<sup>300</sup> Yavuz, *Islamic Political Identity in Turkey*, 181.

<sup>301</sup> Ibid.

<sup>302</sup> For the modern appearance of this cultural feature of Erzurum, see, Ünver Günay, *Erzurum ve Çevre Köylerinde Dini Hayat* [Religious Life in Erzurum and Its Countryside] (Istanbul: Erzurum Kitaplığı, 1999).

linguistic channels of Arabic and Persian.<sup>303</sup> Generally, these regional characteristics of Ahlat and Erzurum conditioned Gülen's approach toward frontier Islamic idioms that stressed the Islamic foundations as embedded in the example of the Prophet Muhammad and the nationalistic form of Islam. Specifically, an utmost atmosphere of tasawwuf in this zone played a crucial role in leading Gülen's Islamic fermentation to a spiritual and moral focus.

In this rural-spiritual environment, Gülen's parents raised him with a pervasive spiritual perspective on life within the Muslim tradition. Gülen's memoir<sup>304</sup> traces his familial lineage back to his great-grandfather, Molla Ahmed, who came to Korucuk and settled there. He remembers Molla Ahmet as a heroic person of piety and ascetic, who spent his life with a full of prayers, while 'little sleeping, eating and drinking.' Molla Ahmet is said to have never stretched out his legs to lie on a bed and sleep for the last thirty years of his life. His grandfather, Şamil Ağa, who found Molla Ahmed as a true model of sainthood, maintained a similar life with sincerity and dignity in his Islamic spiritual life that led Gülen to liken him to a man of the next world. His memory records more vividly his grandmother, Munise Hanim, in whom Gülen first perceived the world and with whom he first observed belief in Allah. Her personality that talked little and behaved softly with no anger in any circumstance left a great deal of influence on the softness of Gülen's heart. His mother, Rafi'a Hanim, showed a sincere concern about the Islamic education of her son and taught him the Qur'an at his very early age at a time when even reciting the Qur'an was prosecuted. Thanks to her, Gülen eventually

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<sup>303</sup> See, Karamustafa, "Early Sufism in Eastern Anatolia," 176.

<sup>304</sup> The following description of Gülen's memory comes from Erdoğan, *Küçük Dünyam*, 15-26.



memorized the Qur'an and began praying at the age of five, since which he has never missed a prayer. Gülen's appreciation to his father, Ramiz Efendi, is also deep. He recalls him as a sincere lover of the Prophet Muhammad and the Companions, as a desperate seeker for knowledge and as a self-disciplined person who never allowed even momentous time-wasting. To be sure, these aspects of his father were strongly instilled in young Gülen's personality, as they appeared to a great similarity in Gülen's later thought and lifestyle. As Gülen's admiration of his father's life implies, it is also certain that Ramiz Efendi's involvement in Naqshbandiyya<sup>305</sup> initiated Gülen's positive perception of Sufism.

Though Gülen does not explicitly mention the direct influence of Sufism via his familial lineage, it is not difficult to note prominent Sufi qualities in Gülen's memory. The fact that such features as piety, asceticism, spirituality and certain linkage with Naqshbandiyya were everywhere in Gülen's narrative illuminates a deeply embedded Sufism as cultural elements on his early family life, which were to form his ascetic lifestyle and empathetic perception of Sufism. Apart from this, the local environment contributed to formatting Gülen's Sufism. Korucuk that Gülen spent childhood and received early education maintained conservative Islamic values with the coexistence of tariqas and madrasas.<sup>306</sup> In spite of the Kemalist anti-tariqa policy, Gülen's memory clarifies the existence of tekke education along with official madrasa institutions. This implies that the governmental persecution of tariqas resulted in outward changes of

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<sup>305</sup> See, Zeki Sarıtoprak and Griffith, Sidney, "Fethullah Gülen and the 'People of the Book': A Voice from Turkey for Interfaith Dialogue," *The Muslim World* 95/3 (2005), 331.

<sup>306</sup> Eyup Can, *Fethullah Gülen Hocaefendi ile Ufuk Turu* [The Tour d'Horizon with Fethullah Gülen's Hocaefendi] (Istanbul: AD Publishing, 1997), 71-72.

tariqas, whose essential functions still operated to impact the masses. In his study of mystical tradition in eastern Anatolia in the early modern period, Nur Yalman illustrates reformed mystical movements associated with tariqas that flourished entirely outside official recognition by producing “holy men who are interested and capable of spontaneous and creative new interpretations of Islam at all levels.”<sup>307</sup> In that local condition, Gülen received his early education both in tekke and madrasa in “the same rhythms.”<sup>308</sup> He completed the latter in a short time, which he would never have another opportunity to receive an official education. By contrast, his education in tekke continued for a while, and he took a great benefit from it. Thus, Gülen recalls, “tekke was the first place that opened my eye and yeast my spirituality.”<sup>309</sup> Other than this institutional education, young Gülen was also greatly influenced by guests of his house. Partly from Turkish tradition of hospitality (*misafirlik*) and partly from his father’s pursuit of knowledge, his house was full of guests including imams, ulama and Sufi shaykhs who were widely respected in the region. In Gülen’s narrative, from the time that he was around five years of age, he always sat with these older people and listened to them explain things that satisfied his mind and heart, while he never hung out with his peers or age group. As a result, the conversation of the guests played a significant role in the development of young Gülen’s spirituality, morality and knowledge of the world, as well

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<sup>307</sup> Nur Yalman, “Islamic Reform and the Mystic Tradition in Eastern Turkey,” *European Journal of Sociology* 10:1(1969), 58-59.

<sup>308</sup> Erdoğan, *Küçük Dünyam*, 41.

<sup>309</sup> *Ibid*, 40.

as led him to be familiar with *sohbet* (*suhba* in Arabic means companionship-in-conversation) atmosphere.<sup>310</sup>

Among the guests was Muhammad Lutfi Efendi (d. 1956), who exerted a life-long influence on Gülen's personality and his perception of Sufism. Lutfi Efendi, known also as *Efe Hazretleri* and *Alvarlı Efe*, was one of the greatest Naqshbandi shaykhs of Erzurum.<sup>311</sup> A recent bibliographic study depicts him as a cultural icon of modern Erzurum, whose influences encompass almost all cultural aspects including art, *ilahi* (religious) literature and music.<sup>312</sup> One of his unique life principles that were widely remembered was 'no having food without guest.'<sup>313</sup> What this implies, it was not coincidence that Gülen had acquainted with him as a house guest. Later at his age of ten, Gülen was admitted to take lessons from Lutfi Efendi, and continued to study in his tekke until Gülen reached the age of sixteen and for the last period of Lutfi Efendi's life. From *Alvar İmamı*, Gülen's respectful call of Lutfi Efendi, he received spiritual lessons and learned Sufi principles and practices.<sup>314</sup> Lutfi's inspiration remains in Gülen's memory so strongly as "Every word coming out of his mouth appeared as inspiration flowing from another realm. We listened attentively whenever he talked, for it was as if we were

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<sup>310</sup> Ünal and Williams, *Advocate of Dialogue*, 11.

<sup>311</sup> Abdülkadir Süphandağı, "Efe Hazretlerinin Batmayan Güneşi," *Aksiyon* (12.03.2007), 640. For his overall thought as appeared in his poetry work, see, Muhammed Lutfi, *Hulasat ul-hakayık ve mektubat-ı Hacı Muhammed Lutfi* (Istanbul: Alvarlı Efe Hazretleri İlim ve Sosyal Hizmetleri Vakfı, 2006).

<sup>312</sup> Huseyin Kutlu, *Hacı Muhammed Lutfi (Efe Hazretleri) hayatı, şahsiyeti ve eserleri* (Istanbul: Efe Hazretleri Vakfı. 2006), 120-167.

<sup>313</sup> Ibid, 109; and, Ahmet Ersoz, *Alvarlı Efe Hazretleri Hacı Muhammed Lutfi Efendi* (Izmir: Nil Yayınları, 1991), 50.

<sup>314</sup> Ünal and Williams, *Advocate of Dialogue*, 14. Kutlu's study that clarifies Lutfi's teaching in 1939-1956 gives clue for what Gülen learned from Lutfi; see, Huseyin Kutlu, *Hacı Muhammed Lutfi*, 81-88.

hearing celestial things that had previously come down to Earth.”<sup>315</sup> Gülen admits that he was too young to understand the teachings of Alvar imami; he nevertheless appreciates him by confessing, “he was the one who first awakened my consciousness and perceptions” and “my intuition, sensitivity, and feelings of today are due to my sensations in his presence.”<sup>316</sup> In effect, Lutfi’s inspirational teaching continually appears as one of the main sources of Gülen’s Sufi vision.<sup>317</sup> Furthermore, Gülen’s remembrance of him as an exceptional one who achieved both knowledge of madrasa and love and passion of tekke<sup>318</sup> indicates a certain debt of Gülen’s distinctive pedagogical system to Lutfi. His stress on tolerance by his word and action<sup>319</sup> has also a certain link to Gülen’s advocacy of tolerance and dialogue.

The death of Lutfi, from whom Gülen “witnessed saintly miracles,” remains one of the biggest shocks in Gülen’s memory.<sup>320</sup> Perhaps, due to Lutfi’s influence, Gülen continued to receive spiritual instructions in Sufism in a Qadir tekke under Rasim Baba.<sup>321</sup> However, these instructions did not last long. Gülen recalls that a rumor from

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<sup>315</sup> Ünal and Williams, *Advocate of Dialogue*, 10; and Erdoğan, *Küçük Dünyam*, 28.

<sup>316</sup> Ibid.

<sup>317</sup> Among a quite considerable number of examples, for instance, when he explains a Sufi concept of *Tawadu* or ‘Humility’ in his *Emerald Hills of the Heart*, Gülen refers to Lutfi’s words that “Everybody else is good but I am bad; everybody else is wheat but I am chaff.” Gülen, *The Emerald Hills of the Heart 1*, 76.

<sup>318</sup> Gülen, “Introduction” to Ahmet Ersoz, *Alvarlı Efe Hazretleri HaCe Muhammed Lutfi Efendi*.

<sup>319</sup> Regarding to his tolerant attitude, it is said that Lutfi Efendi embraced all people even the drunken. See, Kutlu, *Hace Muhammed Lutfi*, 79.

<sup>320</sup> Erdoğan, *Küçük Dünyam*, 41.

<sup>321</sup> See, *ibid*, 40-41.

Rasim Baba's attempt to make him marry his daughter estranged him from the tekke.<sup>322</sup> After this experience, which certainly conflicted with what Gülen learned from the saintly and tolerant life of Lutfi, he eventually severed his connection with the tekke. In addition, he also recalls how his dressing style of ironed pants was seen by the members of the tekke as a lack of piety.<sup>323</sup> Yet, since Gülen's memory regarding the negative experience of tekkes ended here, it is hard to see to what degree it affected his approach to Sufism. Nevertheless, the fact that it remains clear in Gülen's memory makes it possible to envisage that this direct experience had a certain influence on his general perception of tekkes. The dissociation of himself from the tekke directed Gülen to focus on the other Islamic disciplines. In particular, Gülen learned fiqh from Osman Bektas, a professional in the field. He engaged in this study, which took two years.<sup>324</sup> In the end, he was able to attain a combination of Islamic knowledge with its spirituality, in his own expression, the marriage of intellect with heart (*kalb ile kafa*).

During this process toward his maturity both intellectually and spiritually, Gülen encountered *Risalei Nur*, the masterpiece of Bediüzzaman Said Nursi, which contributed a great deal to Gülen's spiritual and intellectual formation and further gravitated his life toward it. Certainly, Gülen was not totally ignorant of Nursi, whose *Risalei Nur* was widely available in the Sufi environment in which Gülen grew up.<sup>325</sup> Yet, it was not until he directly met with one of Nursi's student in 1957 that Gülen got down to the study of

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<sup>322</sup> Ibid, 41.

<sup>323</sup> Ibid, 42.

<sup>324</sup> Ibid, 41.

<sup>325</sup> Sarıtoprak and Sidney, "Fethullah Gülen and the People of the Book," 330. Interestingly, Ahmet Ersoz notes the correspondence of Said Nursi with Lutfi; see, Ersoz, *Alvarlı Efe Hazretleri*, 62.

*Risalei Nur*. It was Muzaffer Arslan, a student of Nursi, who came to Erzurum following the advice of Nursi. Arslan stayed there for fifteen days for explaining *Risalei Nur* to the people of Erzurum. From the first sermon of Arslan to its last, Gülen listened to them in high excitement. Not only the sermons but also Arslan's behaviors touched Gülen. In Gülen's eyes, his behaviors reflected sincerity and piety of the Companions. This eventually led Gülen to consider the people of *Risalei Nur* as those who he was looking for. In a short period after Arslan left, Nursi sent a letter to Erzurum, and Gülen found his name in that letter as one that Nursi gave salutation to. This occasion together with his encounter with *Risalei Nur* and close observation of Arslan's exemplary behaviors became a turning point of Gülen's life, as it immediately followed his life-mattered decision to be united with the Nur movement and devote his life for it. Since then, Nursi's writings became a major reference of Gülen's intellectual/spiritual life and his teachings. From this aspect, it is significant to note the place of Sufism in Nursi's life and works. As many studies on Nursi have shed light on, one of the most powerful layers of Nursi's thought is Sufism.<sup>326</sup> This has in turn exerted a foundational role of Gülen's spiritual life and Sufi tendencies.

As analyzed so far, Sufism served as a distinctive and powerful resource that informed Gülen's early childhood. While the regional culture of Ahlat/Erzurum and the institution of family provided him a fertile soil of such Sufi qualities as asceticism (*zuhd*), piety (*ihlas*) and strong spiritual flavor, Muhammad Lutfi Efendi and Bediüzzaman Said Nursi inculcated his early spirituality and approach to Sufism with broad and deepened

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<sup>326</sup> For an insightful work on Nursi's thought of Sufism, see, Hamid Algar, "Sufism and Tarikat in the Life and Work of Bediüzzaman Said Nursi," *Journal of the History of Sufism*, vol. 3 (2001-2002).

knowledge. Later on, the Sufi qualities that embedded in Gülen's personality and thought would become criteria of his interaction with the world and a primary reference of his life-long teaching career.

*Teaching and Hizmet (Service) – the Gülen movement: 1959-1979*

Gülen began his teaching career in his late teens in 1959 as a state imam appointed by the Turkish Directorate of Religious Affairs. The first place of his duty was Edirne, the city of the far west from Turkish frontier. Once served as the second capital city (after Bursa) of the Ottoman Empire and remained its important role as the door to Europe, Edirne maintains its value of coexistence of Islamic and European culture, more opening to the latter than Anatolian conservative Islam like Erzurum. As much as this geographical and cultural distance to Erzurum, Edirne gave striking experience to Gülen. He stayed there for three years, during which he faced the conditions of his time, which, on the one hand, stiffened his Islamic worldview and highly austere lifestyle, and on the other, formulated his worldview and pedagogical philosophy. Gülen observed 'life without Islamic belief and morality,' for instance, "women in street at night who behaved in too free-and-easy a way around men."<sup>327</sup> Against this condition that flatly conflicted with his conservative Islamic background of Erzurum, Gülen's imminent response was to stick more to his ascetic lifestyle that had been inherited from his familial lineage. In order to protect his belief, he took refuge in a mosque, whose window side facilitated him

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<sup>327</sup> Erdoğan, *Küçük Dünyam*, 49.

to stay.<sup>328</sup> During his residence there for two and a half years, Gülen maintained highly austere life just as how he later defines *Zuhd* (Asceticism) in his work on Sufism as “choosing to refrain from sin in fear of God and renouncing this world’s temporary ease and comfort for the sake of eternal happiness in the Hereafter.”<sup>329</sup> Gülen narrates that he became so ascetic of ‘little sleeping and little eating’ with minimal necessities that he had to be hospitalized for 15 days.<sup>330</sup> While protecting his belief by this lifestyle, he came to realize a demanding necessity of Islamic education particularly on its spirituality and morality. With respect to his whole life, this first and strong experience of a non-Islamic life triggered his education-centered activities and determined his teaching philosophy. Later on, as a main topic of his sermons, Gülen has constantly accentuated Islamic morality as the essence and the most important principle of Islam. In that, he suggests Sufism as the foundation of Islamic morality that ‘warps one’s personal qualities up in the divine morality.’<sup>331</sup> On this basis, Gülen conceptualizes ‘*Nefis Terbiyesi*’ (self training) in his various sermons and puts it as a core of the educational activities of his movement.<sup>332</sup>

Gülen’s ascetic lifestyle, experience in the non-Islamic conditions of the time and attachment to *Risalei Nur* continued in the following period of his military service. In this period of physical exercise, deprivation, solitude and surveillance, his ascetic practice

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<sup>328</sup> Ibid, 50.

<sup>329</sup> Gülen, *The Emerald Hills of the Heart 1*, 42.

<sup>330</sup> Erdoğan, *Küçük Dünyam*, 51.

<sup>331</sup> Gülen, *The Emerald Hills of the Heart 1*, xiii-xiv.

<sup>332</sup> Gülen, *Towards the Lost Paradise*, (London: Truostar, 1996), 30.



caused him a serious illness. This, however, gave him an opportunity to return back to Erzurum for medical treatment. There, while preaching in various mosques, Gülen also delivered conference speeches, one of which focused on Jalal al-Din Rumi. He explains how intensively his presentation of Rumi as a genuine Muslim greatly shocked the audiences who had perceived Rumi a pantheist representative in the dominance of disbelief.<sup>333</sup> This memory suggests that Gülen already had solid knowledge of classical Sufism while still in his twenties enough to present them in tune with the conditions of the time. His recollection of a commander as ‘a very wise man who had a deep knowledge of Sufism and who motivated him to read Western classics also indicates his sustained concern in Sufism in this military period.

Years of Gülen’s experience in the given conditions were followed by Izmir period, the embryonic period for the formation of the Gülen movement. In 1966, Gülen was transferred to Izmir as an official imam and held a managerial position at the Kestanepazari Qur’an School. During this period that lasted around five years until 1971, he, while continuing his preaching, tutored hundreds of youths in orthodox and Sufi interpretations of Islamic doctrine.<sup>334</sup>

A most distinctive and effective means that Gülen utilized for tutoring youths was a series of summer camps. The first camp was held in 1968 for local high school and university students. For and in this camp, Gülen elaborated and applied an innovative system of education, which was shaped by a tripod axis; tekke, madrasa and mektep. He recalls:

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<sup>333</sup> See, Erdoğan, *Küçük Dünyam*, 77.

<sup>334</sup> See, *ibid*, 98-99.

The generation to be raised should be well disciplined like a military. The camps should also resemble military barracks. However, they should not be closed to the dimension of spiritual delights. In this sense, the camps must resemble a tekke. [Indeed] Reading *Tasbihat*, *Jawshan* and *Evrad-ı Kudsiye* used to form an excellent dimension. On the other hand, as it was also necessary to operate intellect along with heart, reading books and taking Arabic lessons made the camps look like a madrasa. Taken as such, discipline of military, morality of tekke and knowledge of madrasa became an integrated whole in the camps, which formulated our first step into the world that we imagined.<sup>335</sup>

The true education for Gülen is to develop one's knowledge and spirituality with discipline. None of these qualities can be discharged or individually operative for accomplishing the educational goal. In this sense, Gülen found the true education in an integrated educational system of tekke, madrasa and mektep. He criticized the existing school system, which had run traditional madrasas, Sufi tekkes and military academies individually and independently to fail to provide an combined training of scientific knowledge with human and spiritual values.<sup>336</sup> From this reading, Gülen designed an integrated system of tekke, madrasa and mektep, and applied it first to the camps.<sup>337</sup> Thus, the goal of the camps was to raise up integrated youths - well-disciplined and religiously-spiritually-motivated person.

Both in Gülen's own evaluation and in reality for his movement, this new educational system turned out to be highly successful. As it aimed, the students in the first camp developed spiritual abilities with Islamic and secular knowledge, while upholding disciplined lifestyle. Among them emerged the first and core devotees who internalized all three qualities, and with this young people, Gülen laid the foundation of a

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<sup>335</sup> Ibid, 122.

<sup>336</sup> For Gülen's critical approach to madrasa, mektep and tekke as an individual education system, see, Can, *Ufuk Turu*, 72-87.

<sup>337</sup> Gülen characterizes this integrated system as a "threefold" (*Üçlü*) education; see, *ibid*, 77.

civic movement, which would be later known as the Gülen Movement. Since then, the first camp has become an ideal model for numerous later camps, which continue to be held in various regions of Turkey and all over the world. At the same time, the tripod pillar of madrasa, tekke and mektep became the core structure of Gülen's educational programs.<sup>338</sup> The establishment of youths' daily residences of dormitories and rented houses soon followed the early camps of the 1960's. These residences succeeded the educational system of the camps, and served like everyday mini-camps. Gülen called these residences *Isik Evler* or Light Houses on the basis of the Qur'an and the Islamic history of great Muslims. The verse of *Nur* that reads "(Lit is such a Light) in houses, which Allah hath permitted to be raised to honor; for the celebration, in them, of His name: In them is He glorified in the mornings and in the evenings, (again and again)!" (The Qur'an, 24:36) was interpreted as a sanction for the establishment of the Light Houses. As the foremost model, Gülen exemplified the places of the Prophet Muhammad and great Sufis like Ghazali and Sirhindi.<sup>339</sup> As idealized as such religiously-oriented places, to Gülen, the Light Houses have an integral function of *madrasa*, *tekke* and *zawiya*; the function that ensures a religious-spiritual environment to enable its residents to realize *ihya* (revival) of their Islamic orientation and pursue spiritually meaningful life amidst the dominant material-centric world and its accompanying spiritual emptiness.<sup>340</sup> In the Houses, the youths that mostly were high school and college students, under the careful instruction of their seniors (*ağabey* in Turkish, pronounced *abi*), communally

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<sup>338</sup> See, *ibid*, 79-80.

<sup>339</sup> Fethullah Gülen, *Prizma 2*, (Izmir: Nil, 1997), 13.

<sup>340</sup> *Ibid*, 13.

fulfilled daily Islamic obligations and spent contemplate and speculative time by reciting litanies and reading selections from Nursi's books and Gülen's teachings. Since this initiation, the Houses have developed to the nucleus of Gülen's educational network<sup>341</sup> and foundational formation of his movement.

This formative process of the Gülen movement throughout the educational activities of the camps and the light houses demonstrates how Sufism was practically incorporated in the movement from its beginning. Such core Sufi qualities as ascetic and self-sacrifice for one's spiritual growth rather than material-focused life led the first generation of the camps and the light houses to render themselves toward a life-long devotion for the service of the movement. In this sense, Gülen has empathetically called his name-associated movement *hizmet* (*khidma* in Arabic).<sup>342</sup> Referring to 'service for humanity,' *hizmet* is the supreme task of the movement, which can only be actualized by people of indifference to one's self-centered worldly success. Actually, the general usage of *hizmet* is as wide as to include various implications of civic activities in education, the Qur'an, faith and religion (education *hizmet*, the Qur'an *hizmet*, iman *hizmet*, dine *hizmet*). However, all detailed usages converge into 'hizmet for humanity' (*insana hizmet*). In Gülen's schema, "the concept of *hizmet* is very important. They [the people of the movement] want to contribute to service of humans who live in the existing world. One

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<sup>341</sup> For the role of the Light House in the educational network, see, Bekim Agai, "The Gülen Movement's Islamic Ethic of Education," in *Turkish Islam and the Secular State: The Gülen Movement*, eds., Hakan Yavuz and Esposito, John (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2003), 48-68.

<sup>342</sup> As a Turkified word from the Ottoman era derived from the Arabic *khidma*, *Hizmet* literally means 'a service rendered to someone.' Gülen's specific usage of this term will be examined in chapter 5.

of the ways to do good service for humans is to provide a good education.”<sup>343</sup> To this extent, Gülen’s conception of *hizmet* is not on *teblig* or dissemination of Islam but on *hizmet* for all humans. Thus, to do *hizmet* for humanity is by no means an easy task, imposing an extreme hardship of altruism.<sup>344</sup> To do *hizmet* requires both an intrinsically determined motivation and its extrinsic reflection for rendering to sacrifice one’s life for service to humanity. Therefore, self-sacrifice and asceticism are two core virtues of *hizmet*, both of which originate from and reflect Gülen’s perception of Sufism.

Gülen left Kestanepazari for Guzelyali in 1971, where he continued his educational *hizmet* by establishing student dormitories. However, this activity was soon seriously challenged by the 1971 military coup. Together with some prominent Nurcus, Gülen was arrested with the charge of the violation of clandestine religious association,<sup>345</sup> specifically for organizing camps. After spending seven months in prison, he was acquitted. In the time that the movement had just begun, this oppressive situation fenced in Gülen’s public activities, and so affected to a great degree his *hizmet*. He recalls how bitter and painful this period was: “Repeatedly I struggle to forget and forgive. I think, to do so is the most difficult thing. How much I begged to my Lord with prayers to let me forget these incidents. Yet, I cannot forget completely because perhaps every effort to forget and forgive causes to win a reward from the new beginning.”<sup>346</sup> Perhaps, as this memory implies, the reward of the period was for Gülen to acquire a more enduring and

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<sup>343</sup> Gülen, Interview with Nuriye Akman, *Zaman*, 9 June 2003.

<sup>344</sup> See, Erdoğan, *Küçük Dünyam*, 105-106.

<sup>345</sup> Yavuz, *Islamic Political Identity in Turkey*, 183. For Gülen’s memory of his prison, see, Erdoğan, *Küçük Dünyam*, 133-175.

<sup>346</sup> Gülen, “Yalnızlığı Zehir Gibi Yudumladım,” in en.fgulen.com.

tolerant attitude. As serious as it was, the incident further led him to readdress his conviction of universal and spiritual Islam over its political manifestations. Gülen remained very skeptical of the self-centered attitudes of politicians for their own political goals, putting an emphasis on a point that “there should be no doubt that our attitude is beyond politics.”<sup>347</sup> The distance between him and politics secured his civic educational movement from political activism or political Islam that some of the Nur movements and traditional tariqas had shown by their deep involvement in politics. In spite of this distance, Gülen felt the necessity of intimate relationship with politicians to utilize political means to get access to his educational civil activities. He kept a close tie with leading politicians such as Necmeddin Erbakan and Suleyman Demirel, former Prime Ministers.<sup>348</sup> Partly owing to this relationship and partly due to his cultural-centric movement, he was able to guide his devotees to establish several educational institutions (such as the Foundation for Turkish Teachers and the Foundation of Middle and Higher Education in Akyazi) and to publish *Sızıntı* magazine in the second half of the 1970’s.

As a part of his cultural educational *hizmet*, Gülen also engaged himself in a series of conferences entitled ‘Science and the Holy Koran,’ ‘Darwinism’ and ‘the Golden Generation’ between 1976 and 1977. Significantly, his deep consideration on *hizmet* and on-going educational activities reflected in his speech on the Golden Generation. Gülen coined *Altın Nesil* or the Golden Generation to define “a generation with minds enlightened by positive science, with hearts purified by faith, who would be

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<sup>347</sup> Gülen, “Tavrımız Siyaset Üstü,” in en.fgulen.com.

<sup>348</sup> Ibid. Interestingly, Erbakan, the foremost representative of Turkish political Islam, evaluated Gülen’s educational activities in the 1960’s as ‘a necessary cultural *hizmet* for Turks’ remained clearly in Gülen’s memory as a correct description of his activities.

an example of virtue and who would burn with the desire to serve their nation and humanity, and who would live, not for themselves, but for others.”<sup>349</sup> To him, the very representative of this generation of humanism is the generation of “the Age of Happiness,” i.e., “the Time of the Prophet and the Four Caliphs,” the best model for those who come later.<sup>350</sup> In this context, Gülen presented and imposed the Golden generation as the ideal goal of his educational project, that is, to train youths to follow the model by harmonizing intellectuality with wise spirituality and humane activism. To attain this goal, Gülen further informed certain specific qualities of the Golden generation, which is characterized with three main categories: *muhabba*, a generous affection both to friends and to enemies; *hamle*, an action to conquer one’s mind first, then to try to save others as a man of action (*aksiyon insanı*); *muraqaba*, a self-reflection to account oneself by a consistent self-control.<sup>351</sup> These qualities indicate a developmental stage of a person of the Golden generation, which displays Gülen’s reference to Sufi terminology and its guideline of spiritual stages. Hermansen approaches the idea of the Golden generation in this sense. In her examination, the underlying key concepts such as inner self-evaluation (*muhasaba*), love, friendliness (*dostane*), self-control and reflection (*muraqaba*) refer to particular practices and spiritual stages of the Sufi path, and thus they are clear indications of the influence of Sufism in the formulation of the Golden generation.<sup>352</sup> Indeed, a close look at the Gülen’s thought holistically makes it possible to read the

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<sup>349</sup> Gülen, “Claims and Answers,” *Aksiyon*, 06 June 1998.

<sup>350</sup> Gülen, “Altın Nesil Konferansı,” in en.fgulen.com.

<sup>351</sup> Ibid.

<sup>352</sup> Hermansen, “Understanding of “Community” within the Gülen Movement.”

Golden generation as the generation, who starts with faith and love (*ashq*), uses these qualities as a criteria of self-evaluation (*muhasaba*), then make all of these useful for others with action (*hamle*) of self-reflection (*muraqaba*) and intimate relationship (*muhabba*).<sup>353</sup> These Sufi qualities are the essential means to lead one to be among ‘selfless people, sincerely thinking of others rather than themselves’ like Jalal al-Din Rumi and Yunus Emre. For Gülen, to prepare a fertile soil for the Golden generation is an incomparable and invaluable task to any other works including politically engaged activities. Thus, Gülen’s biography since the 1980’s records his exclusive concentration on educational and cultural civic activities instead of seeking the state power or political implications.

*Hocaefendi vs. Fethullahcilar: 1980-1999*

The time from the beginning of 1980 to the end of the 1990’s was a period that Gülen’s *hizmet* for the Golden generation both experienced its nation-wide expansion and undertook public controversy on its political implications and Sufi tendencies. The political environment of relative tolerance to Islam in the early 1980’s and Gülen’s close ties with leading politicians served for a while as a safeguard for his leadership of the educational-focused and politically distanced cultural movement. His friendship especially with Turgut Özal, who held premiership and presidentship between 1983-1993, vested him an official protection. Gülen’s vision of moderate Islam cooperated with

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<sup>353</sup> See, Gülen, “Altın Neslin Vasıfları,” *Sızıntı*, vol. 19 (March 1997), 218.



Özal's political ambition of 'little America' against extremist Islamism.<sup>354</sup> Under the external protection, Gülen was able to endure police prosecution<sup>355</sup> and to mobilize his devotees toward an internal preparation for the Golden generation in tune with the new political, legal and economic environment. During this period, Gülen's distinctive educational system of the tripod body of tekke, madrasa and mektep, which continually produced both teachers and students of *tarbiyah* (ethical and spiritual training) and *talim* (teaching modern sciences) with discipline, met a national need that the privatization of education since 1983 had raised. The early generation of the camps in the 1970's now became significant cells in spreading out Gülen's educational *hizmet* and in establishing schools, dormitories and light houses all around the nation. On the other hand, Gülen continued to give public sermons on the centralized message of liberal, inclusive, tolerant and humanitarian Turkish Islam to much increasing number of listeners. The consequent establishment of media institutions associated with his movement such as the daily Zaman, Burc FM, Samanyolu TV and number of magazines also became a major vehicle of publicizing and popularizing Gülen's Islamic worldview. All of these activities facilitated his movement to evolve into one of the most influential civil movements and circulated his reputation nation-wide as a *Hocaefendi*. The term Hocaefendi literally consists of *Hoca* (teacher) and *Efendi* (respected man), which together refers to 'a respected teacher' and has been traditionally used to denote 'religious knowledgeable

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<sup>354</sup> See, Yavuz, *Islamic Political Identity in Turkey*, 183. For Gülen's close relationship with Turgut Özal, see, his interview with Nuriye Akman, *Sabah*, 24 January 1995. For the relationship, it might be relevant that Özal was a member of a Naqshi order and a support of its activities.

<sup>355</sup> In fact, Gülen not only avoided to be arrested by police prosecution during the 1980 military coup, but also took a benefit from Özal's policy that lifted the 1980 coup ban on his public preaching: see, Yavuz, *Islamic Political Identity in Turkey*, 183.

men like imams and ulama.’<sup>356</sup> Actually, Gülen had been known as *Hocaefendi* since the Izmir period. Yet, while the title then remained exclusively in the inner circle of his followers, it became, in the 1980’s, a nationally-recognized title for Gülen. Its specific usage as a suffix to the name of Gülen and its wide circulation clearly indicates his nation-wide influence.

Since the mid 1990’s, however, the growing reputation of Gülen as an influential hocaefendi was seriously damaged with a reactionary suspicion raised by secularist media, Kemalist military elites and political Islamists. Ironically, on the one hand, his moderate Islam and its transformation to public prominence shocked many Islamist politicians and intellectuals, causing them to depict the Gülen’s movement as a non-Islamic interest institution. On the other hand, his faith-oriented movement invoked a drastic reaction from the military junta. In continuance of its traditional allergy to Islamic movements especially since the Kemalist revolution, the junta considered the Gülen movement as a threat to the Republic. This dual antipathy was further publicized by several prominent secularist media groups. In particular, a term *fethullahcilar* or ‘partisans of Fethullah’ was invented by the daily news paper *Hürriyet* in 1986 to underline a suspicion of the Gülen movement as a potential danger to the secularist democratic identity of the Republic.<sup>357</sup> Since this initiative, the term *fethullahcilar* became a typical media language for portrayal of Gülen’s fellowship, disseminating a

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<sup>356</sup> See, Ünal and Williams, *Advocate of Dialogue*, 17.

<sup>357</sup> *Hürriyet*, 18-19 July 1986; cited from Tamer Korkmaz, *Zaman*, 17 December 1994.

negative image of Gülen and his movement to the public.<sup>358</sup> A number of national institutions including the state-supported media, police departments, political parties and juridical courts have commonly used *fethullahcilar* to represent all sorts of Gülen associated activities. The wide use of the term covers various sensational scandals on Gülen as developed from ‘one married with 4 women’ and ‘an owner of huge olive orchards’ to ‘a leader of a secret Islamic organization for the final goal of a Shari’a state’ and ‘a person with secret missions from Pope of Rome, CIA and/or the Unification Church.’<sup>359</sup> Significantly, these media-painted pictures of Gülen were hung on the line with a label of *tariqa*, which has been outlawed and remained nationally with an image of a harmful and unnecessary institution to the Republic of Turkey. By relating the Gülen movement to *tariqa*, thus, the media imbued the public with the idea of an imperative ban of it. From this perspective, Gülen’s inspired educational institutions were aggregately seen as *tariqa* organizations with such claims as ‘*tariqa* high schools,’ ‘FEM institution that organizes *Fethullahci* *tariqa* by doing illegal activities like performing prayers’ and ‘Fatih University, a *tariqa* school of *Fethullahci*.’ By the same token, Gülen was portrayed as ‘the shaykh of *Fethullahci* *tariqa*’ and ‘a leader of Naqshbandi order.’ These kinds of media images may have a certain connection to Gülen’s positive view on Sufism. However, a closer look at the scandalizing claims reveals a great lack of supportive evidence, not to mention of academic approach, for the relationship of the Gülen movement and *tariqa*. Instead, as representatively shown in the association of Gülen to

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<sup>358</sup> As a good example of the wide usage of the term, see, Fikret Karagöz, “Çiller, İzmir’de Fethullahçı oldu,” *Hürriyet*, 23 August 1997. This article illustrates Tansu Çiller, former prime minister, as a *Fethullahci* simply because she praised Gülen inspired schools.

<sup>359</sup> See, Gülen, “Bazı İddialara İlişkin Sorulan Sorulara Verdiği Cevaplar,” *Aksiyon*, 6 June 1998.

“the tariqa of the Unification Church,” the claims heavily rely on their destructive idea on the basis of the popular image of ruinous tariqa in modern Turkish. Due to the lack of supportive evidence of the claims, in fact, the concerned court decisions found the most claims and imputations invalid.<sup>360</sup> Notwithstanding, the media has never hesitated to use the tariqa-associated term *fethullacilar*.

The cumulative negative image of the tariqa-associated Gülen movement since the late 1980's betokened a serious blow of accusation against Gülen and his movement in the late 1990's. Along with the media's anti-Gülen campaign, Gülen and his movement have always been under close scrutiny by the secularist political elites and the army junta. Although the 1997 military coup, which enforced a secularist school system, did not seriously affect Gülen's educational activities, it still sufficiently increased the suspicion around Gülen.<sup>361</sup> Within this political framework occurred the so-called 'Cassette Incident,' which fully captured headlines in the media in 1999 and the following years. The cassette recordings of Gülen's sermons in the past were broadcast on TV, which displayed Gülen's goal of Islamic state and his attempt to overturn the secular regime of Turkey.<sup>362</sup> From this, the media described him as 'a national foe,' creating a public sensation. Subsequently, this broadcasting led to an indictment of Gülen

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<sup>360</sup> For examples of the court decisions, see, “Examples of the Court Decisions,” in en.fgulen.com.

<sup>361</sup> Yavuz, *Islamic Political Identity in Turkey*, 202-203.

<sup>362</sup> In the audio recording, Gülen appeared to be saying: “The existing system is still in power. Our friends, who have positions in legislative and administrative bodies, should learn its details and be vigilant all the time so that they can transform it and be more fruitful on behalf of Islam in order to carry out a nationwide restoration. However, they should wait until the conditions become more favorable. In order words, they should not come out too early.” Filiz Baskan, “The Political Economy of Islamic Finance in Turkey: The Role of Fethullah Gülen and Asya Finans,” in *The Politics of Islamic Finance*, eds., Clement M. Henry & Rodney Wilson (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), 236.

on charges of establishing a clandestine organization with a long-term agenda of an Islamic state. Since then, this indictment lasted 6 years until 2006, when an Ankara court acquitted Gülen.<sup>363</sup>

In the face of the image problem of a tariqa-featured *fethullahcilar*, Gülen repeatedly asserted that neither he is a Sufi nor is his movement a tariqa. His imminent response in the mid 1990's was a strong rejection to use the term of *fethullahcilar* attributed to him and his movement. For Gülen, the term implicates not only a tariqa association but also a factious sect in society, both of which are nothing but false and unjustified descriptions:

I have stated innumerable times that I'm not a member of a religious order. As a religion, Islam naturally emphasizes the spiritual realm. It takes the training of the ego as a basic principle. Asceticism, piety, kindness and sincerity are essential to it. In the history of Islam the discipline that dwelt most on these matters was Sufism. Opposing this would be opposing the essence of Islam. The religious orders are institutions that appeared in the name of representing Sufism six centuries after our Prophet, upon him be peace and blessings. They have their own rules and structures. Just as I never joined a Sufi order, I have never had any relationship with one.<sup>364</sup>

This statement displays Gülen's denial of tariqa association with his distinction between tasawwuf and tariqas. To him, tariqas performed their missions in certain periods, but in other periods, when they could not perform their functions followed divisions.<sup>365</sup> By contrast, tasawwuf continued its essential functions regardless of time conditions. To Gülen, while the early Sufi masters like Rumi, Emre and Bektash had laid a cornerstone

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<sup>363</sup> "Gülen acquitted of trying to overthrow secular government," *Turkish Daily News*, 6 May 2006.

<sup>364</sup> Gülen, "Claims and Answers." See also, See also, Ertugrul Ozkok, "Fethullahçılık ve Tarikat" and "Hoca Efendi anlatıyor," *Hurriyet*, 23-30 January 1995; Nuriye Akman, "Fethullah Hoca anlatıyor," *Sabah*, 30 January 1995.

<sup>365</sup> Ozkok, "Fethullahçılık ve Tarikat."

of Turkish Anatolia and further expanded its religious worldview to the Balkans and Europe, later Sufis continued to shed light on a way to the truth, representing how to become a perfect individual with their representative acts of piety, sincerity and love towards God.<sup>366</sup> Gülen also sees, although tekkes and zawiya were closed and tariqas were impeded, “in essence, its (tasawwuf) mission continues until today and will be perpetuated.”<sup>367</sup> Admitting possible flaws of tekkes and zawiya as outer shapes of tasawwuf that eventually caused their closure, he underlines that the state’s ban of tariqas was nothing but a struggle with outer shapes of tasawwuf, touching by no means its essence.<sup>368</sup> For him, “in any case, it was impossible to erase the marks of Rumi, Emre, Bektash, prominent Naqshi shaykhs and others.”<sup>369</sup> At this point, he persistently rejects being considered as a member or a leader of a tariqa. Tariqas have their own distinctive principles, structured ways to a spiritual maturity and its accompanying traditions like chains of succession (*silsila*), submission to the guidance of a shaykh and designation of a coming successor. Since he has none of these characteristics, Gülen identifies himself not as a tariqa-affiliated person or leader. In the same sense, he denies the alleged association of his movement to a tariqa. The movement is, instead, *hizmet*, which focuses on cultural civil educational activities for humanity.

In spite of Gülen’s clear rejection of a tariqa affiliation, a series of sharp criticism of *fethullahcılar* has continually occupied a major daily language of the media and

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<sup>366</sup> Ibid.

<sup>367</sup> Oral Çalışlar, “Tekkeler, Zaviyeler ve İslâm’a Karşı Resmî Tavrda Değişme,” *Cumhuriyet*, 20 August 1995.

<sup>368</sup> Ibid.

<sup>369</sup> Ibid.

become a primary concern of the military elites and Islamists. Against this backdrop, Gülen has had to defend himself and his movement by repeating the above statement. This ongoing paralleled seesaw game had, nevertheless, little effect on the educational activities of the Gülen movement. In contrast to the image of and the expectation from the alleged illegal tariqa associations, the educational institutions of the Gülen movement were closely administrated and operated according to the standards of the state educational law. In doing so, they kept highly successful in the competitive market of Turkish education and further moved forward their activities to central Asian countries. The criticism also could not prevent Gülen from putting his conviction of tolerant Islam and inter-religious dialogue into practice; for instance, he met with the Pope John Paul II in the Vatican.<sup>370</sup> This enduring success within legal boundaries came no doubt into conflict with the well-circulated negative images and accusations. Subsequently, the unilateral issue of tariqa affiliation became an apparent paradox in Gülen's Sufi tendency: on the one hand, obvious absence in Gülen's life of traditional practices of a tariqa such as an affiliation with and submission to a shaykh, on the other hand, his appreciation of tasawwuf and his asceticism, piety and sincerity typically associated with tasawwuf. This paradox, without a sufficient and thick academic analysis, made the issue highly controversial. In other words, there was an obvious controversy on, so to speak, '*Hocaefendi* versus *Fethullahcilar*.' While the outside accusers insist depicting Gülen as a leader of *Fethullahcilar* in terms of his tariqa affiliation, the insider members regard him a *Hocaefendi* as traditional title for a respected teacher without any necessary

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<sup>370</sup> "Fethullah Gülen and his Meeting with the Pope," *The Fountain*, 23 (1998), 14–34.

implication of tariqa.<sup>371</sup> Amidst this context happened the Cassette Incident, which led Gülen to be indicted with the stiffened image of *fethullahcilar*. During the proceedings of the media attack and the consequent indictment, Gülen found himself in the United States and has since remained there.

*Globalization and Ghurba (Separation): 1999 to the present*

Fethullah Gülen came to the United States in 1999. It was, according to him, necessary in order to receive a medical treatment for his heart disease. However, according to the critics, he escaped from the painful situation, in which the media and the secularist criticisms were reaching its highest.<sup>372</sup> In any case, his stay in the States resembled an exile, be it self-imposed or outwardly-driven. In this period, Gülen's life marked two seemingly opposite aspects: enlarging his global vision and experiencing 'separation' and 'estrangement' (*ghurba*).

At the first face, Gülen's liberal view of Islam and his tolerant attitude toward other religions seem to befit the pluralistic American context in particular and globalization of the world in general. In this sense, Yavuz coins "a new Gülen," pointing to a successful transformation of Gülen's nationalistic and statist position toward a more liberal and global perspective.<sup>373</sup> However, this term of 'a new Gülen' seems to be over exaggerated in the sense that Gülen's sermons and articles on love and humanism,

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<sup>371</sup> See, Michel, "Sufism and Modernity in the Thought of Fethullah Gülen."

<sup>372</sup> See, Bulut, *Kim Bu Fethullah Gülen?*

<sup>373</sup> Yavuz, *Islamic Political Identity in Turkey*, 204.



which date back as early as 1980, are consistent up to the present. In particular, his open attempts at dialogue with different religious groups were already active during the 1990's. Nonetheless, it is obvious that Gülen puts much forward his pluralistic view while residing in the States. He has inspired and guided his movement to engage in intercultural and interreligious dialogue on a global level. It followed the movement's various activities such as opening dialogue forums, international conferences, cultural exchange centers, schools (charter schools) and educational foundations.

In this globalizing process of Gülen's thought and his movement, however, the embedded national identity was neither left behind nor absorbed by the global perspective. Gülen has not only held his identity of Turkishness but also presented it in a way of creating a new global Turkish-Islamic identity. John Voll's study on the Gülen movement lays stress on this aspect. He examines the movement from a sociological perspective of 'glocalization' as coined by Roland Robertson for an indication of "an interactive process in which 'global' features take on distinctive 'local' forms and distinctive particularisms emerge that are comprehensible only as part of a global framework of interaction."<sup>374</sup> On this basis, Voll demonstrates that Gülen is a successful representative of the glocal context of pluralistic experience as his local vision of Islam and inclusive view on dialogue interacts harmoniously with a given context of 'glocalization.'<sup>375</sup> In fact, Gülen's global vision of dialogue is a specified extension of vernaculized/nationalistic

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<sup>374</sup> John Voll, "Sufism in the Perspective of Contemporary Theory," paper presented in *International Conference on Sufism and the Modern in Islam* (Bogor, 4-6, September 2003). For Robertson's concept of glocalization, see, Roland Robertson, "Glocalization: Time-Space and Homogeneity-Heterogeneity," in *Global Modernities*, eds. by M. Fetherstone, S. Lash and R. Robertson (London: Sage, 1995), 27-44.

<sup>375</sup> Voll, "Fethullah Gülen: Transcending Modernity in the New Islamic Discourse," 245.

Turkish Islam. Furthermore, as will be detailed in the next Chapter, at the center of Turkish Islam lies his conviction of Turkish Sufism and its associated humanism. To a certain extent, this demonstrates the inseparable involvement of Sufism in Gülen's global discourse in a particular way of confirming the concept of dynamic Sufism, which, as remarked in previous chapters, emphasizes that global characteristic of Sufism takes on its distinctive local forms in its global framework of interaction.

Not only Gülen's global vision, but further his status of exile illustrates how the Turkish Sufi tradition plays a role as a prenatal vitality for sublimating his feeling of isolation into a piety and enduring spirituality. As well established in academia, to live as a Muslim minority in non-Muslim countries requires endurance from losing identity and absorbing into the given culture, and the pluralistic context of America is not exceptional.<sup>376</sup> Gülen's life reflects this aspect. To a certain degree, his difficulty became doubled due to his involuntary separation from the Turkish context of persecution and his physical illness. Indeed, his numerous writings and interviews repeatedly express the feelings of suffering arose from his life in the US. Among those feelings, separation and estrangement are most penetrating experiences, as he recounts:

If a person stays in separation from his home even for a moment,  
He is not as powerful as even a piece of straw, be he as firm as a mountain.  
That helpless, poor one may seem still to be where he is,  
But he always sighs when he recollects his home.  
I have many complaints of separation from friends;  
Nevertheless, this is neither the time nor the place to tell of it.<sup>377</sup>

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<sup>376</sup> For relevant empirical studies on Turkish-American identity formations in the context of American society, see, Ilhan Kaya, "Turkish-American Immigration History and Identity Formations," *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 24/2 (October 2004), 295-308; Roberta Micallef, "Turkish Americans: Performing Identities in a Transnational Setting," *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* 24/2 (October 2004), 233-241.

<sup>377</sup> Gülen, *Emerald Hills of the Heart* 2, 75.

For Gülen, this feeling of separation, however, is neither completely sad nor wholly negative. It is instead a natural course and a great opportunity for the faithful “who are separate” to become, as the Prophet Muhammad encourages, “the most lovable to God Almighty among His servants.”<sup>378</sup> The Prophet also heartens those who are homeless and outsiders from their own lands by saying “Glad tidings to the outsiders who try to improve in a time when all else are engaged in destruction and corruption.”<sup>379</sup> Yet, these outsiders never lament by passively mourning their separation. On the contrary, they are active reflectors who “see separation as living in the realm of bodily existence, the realm between pure materialism and spirituality and a requirement of being on the way to God.”<sup>380</sup> Thus, “they not only endure separation, no matter how difficult it becomes, but they are always ready and desirous to fly to the realm where the souls fly.”<sup>381</sup> Having underlined this, Gülen describes God’s saintly servants, i.e., genuine Sufis, as living representatives of the outsiders. Jalal al-Din Rumi’s poetic words “Listen to the flute, how it recounts; it complains of separation”<sup>382</sup> is an inspirational voice of separation. In Gülen’s view, God’s saintly servants, who “are always suffering separation from the higher realm of spiritual beings, the realm which those who have a true knowledge of God accept as their native land, and they long for reunion in the inter-mediate realm of

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<sup>378</sup> Ibid, 70.

<sup>379</sup> Ibid, 71.

<sup>380</sup> Ibid.

<sup>381</sup> Ibid.

<sup>382</sup> Ibid, 72.

the worldly life,”<sup>383</sup> consider the separation, the transitory moments of loneliness, as signs to be crowned with friendship with God. Thus, they feel the separation rise to friendship with God, “without ever feeling themselves completely alone” and with maintaining ascetic life whose every moment is spent in devotion to Him and at war with feelings of pride and fame.<sup>384</sup>

As the discourse on the experience of separation has long been specified and proliferated in Sufism, Gülen also explains the above account of separation with a Sufi term of *ghurba*. Following the existing Sufi terminology, he considers *ghurba* as the state of separation that renounces “the world with the charms to which one feels attachment on the way to the True, Desired One, or living a life dedicated to the other world though surrounded by this world and its charms.”<sup>385</sup> This account reflects Gülen’s experiential reality of separation. His description of separation as a feeling that “the righteous suffer among wicked transgressors, people of belief and conviction suffer among the unbelievers and heretics, people of knowledge and discernment suffer among the rude and ignorant, and people of spirituality and truth suffer among the bigots, who restrict themselves only to the outward wording of the religious rules”<sup>386</sup> echoes his living experience. This passage further implies that Gülen’s experience in separation is not new to his life in the States, but continues from the past. As implied in the earlier discussion, Gülen’s residence in Edirne, Izmir and other places since he moved out from his

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<sup>383</sup> Ibid, 72-73.

<sup>384</sup> Ibid, 73.

<sup>385</sup> Ibid, 70.

<sup>386</sup> Ibid. 71.

hometown of Erzurum continually led him feel an actual distance from his home. This physical distance was concomitant with a feeling of spiritual separation and isolation. For instance, the over-years controversy around his political implications and tariqa association can be read well with Gülen's consideration of living contradictions and controversies as the bitterest of separation that "is worse than death for those who order their lives, not for their own but for others' happiness."<sup>387</sup> This experience in separation and estrangement continued, more appropriately, was doubled in America, as he explains it with another Sufi state, *Ightirab*. Gülen conceives *ightirab* as "doubled separation which arises from a physical condition is homesickness, separation from one's family, relatives, and friends."<sup>388</sup> Particularly, *ightirab* includes an unbearable feeling of separation that the spirit sinks into when all the means for reunion no longer remain. Although this feeling is very difficult to endure, Gülen relates a hadith that "The death of one away from his home is martyrdom" to his conviction that "if one bears it with belief, one will die a martyr by reading on the basis of."<sup>389</sup> It may not be coincidence that in almost all important aspects, Gülen's writings of the separation and the doubled separation reflect his experience in the exile in the States.

In fact, Gülen's life portrays that he has not been passively enslaved in the feeling of *ghurba*; instead, he actively used it for his own instrumental learning to deepen his piety and spirituality. For instance, due to his feeble health (heart disease and sugar diabetes) and the ongoing close surveillance of Turkish politicians, his physical

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<sup>387</sup> Ibid. 74.

<sup>388</sup> Ibid. 76.

<sup>389</sup> Ibid.

movement has been much restrained in his residing house. In this frustrated situation, Gülen still continues his regular-based daily activities such as meeting guests from all over the world and giving a guiding encouragement for his movement, while spending much time in spiritual-oriented practices, writing numerous books and promoting dialogue activities to the global level. In this context, the transformation of separation occurs in Gülen's glocal identity. In most passages, his discourse about *ghurba* experience is closely linked to his strong appropriation of the local identity of Turkish Islam. Yet, Turkish Islam is not a simple object of nostalgic return but a collective consciousness, which naturally enables Gülen to keep the national identity of Islamic faith. Turkish Islam does not only provide him an enduring power against the backdrop of the exile and its accompanying feeling of separation and isolation, but also meets a requirement of globalization. In Gülen's schema, Turkish Islam, which, as will be examined in the following chapter, has its core of love and tolerant humanism, provides *the way* of accommodating to global context. That is, it intrinsically secures and assures both local and global identity, i.e., glocal identity. Through Turkish Islam, Gülen keeps in balance between the Turkish national identity and the global conditions, and in this way, he sublimates his experience in *ghurba* and *ightirab* to the glocal identity.

As in the cases of his glocal identity and experience in separation, Gülen's life in the States remarks the Sufi qualities as the embedded cultural elements, which have been internalized throughout his whole life. In pointing out this aspect, this section depicted how Gülen inherited, shared and utilized Sufism from his familiar and geographical background to the current residence in the States. This depiction further intimated

Gülen’s Sufi-associated lifestyle, which is another strong indication of the formative role of Sufism in his life, and on which the following section will focus.

### 3. 2. Sufism in Gülen’s lifestyle

A distinguishing mark of Fethullah Gülen is “man of action,” a life principle of him and core concept of his thought. Both members of his movement and many academicians commonly characterize him as a man of action in both his thought and lifestyle. While his consistency of word and action has greatly inclined his associates toward full respect,<sup>390</sup> his idea and praxis of ‘man of action’ likewise draws scholarly attention as a foundational character of his Islamic worldview and his movement.<sup>391</sup> Ergene, a close associate of Gülen, goes a step further by demonstrating that the idea of man of action is at the core of Gülen’s teachings.<sup>392</sup> Indeed, all primary concepts of Gülen such as *hizmet* for humanity and the Golden generation presuppose action. In essence, “Islam, for Gülen, must be represented by actions, and these actions, in turn, are expressions of faith.”<sup>393</sup> In particular, he admires a person who identifies faith and action with never being satisfied with existing conditions and performing his or her best works

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<sup>390</sup> For instance, his own followers hold that Gülen is a “true leader who leads by example, [who] lives as he preaches and presents an ideal living model to emulate.” See, Gülen, *Emerald Hills of the Heart I*, vi.

<sup>391</sup> See, Yavuz, *Islamic Political Identity in Turkey*, 185-190; and, Elisabeth Özdalga, “Worldly Asceticism in Islamic Casting: Fethullah Gülen’s Inspired Piety and Activism,” *Critique: Critical Middle Eastern Studies* 17 (2000), 83–104.

<sup>392</sup> Ergene, *Geleneğin Modern Çağa Tanıklığı*, 257-264.

<sup>393</sup> Yavuz, *Islamic Political Identity in Turkey*, 188.

for a better world. He conceptualizes this ideal with *aksiyon insani* or “man of action.”<sup>394</sup> Just as is the case with his other concepts, Gülen finds *aksiyon insani*’s origin in the Prophet, who “encouraged his people to do perfectly whatever they did and condemned inaction and begging.”<sup>395</sup> On this basis, Gülen underlines, “action should be the most indispensable element or feature of our lives. Even at the cost of many losses, we should take on necessary responsibilities and strive in action and thought continually to realize them.”<sup>396</sup>

As a man more of action than idea, Gülen is much concerned about the practical application and transformation of his thought into his life. In other words, his lifestyle in both public and private spheres is a pragmatic embodiment of what he thinks and teaches. Accordingly, his Sufi convictions as appeared in his life are reflected in his lifestyle. To figure out what specific and to what degree Sufi qualities are involved in his lifestyle, it is useful to begin with a brief note on his daily life.

### *Daily- life*

According to Said Tunçpınar, who, as a student of Gülen, stayed with him about 7 years until 2007, Gülen’s daily life follows a simple and consistent timetable. Due to his physical discomfort, Gülen begins his day with night prayer, *tahajjud*. After *tahajjud*,

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<sup>394</sup> Gülen, *Prizma 1* (Istanbul 1997), 9.

<sup>395</sup> Gülen, *Prophet Muhammad: Aspects of His Life 1*, trans. Ali Ünal. (Fairfax, VA: Fountain. 2000), 105.

<sup>396</sup> Gülen, “Action and Thought,” *The Fountain*, 13 (1996), 2.



Gülen spends about an hour reading *dua* upon *al-Qulub al-Daria*. Then, he performs the *fazr* prayer, which is followed by reading *tasbihat* or leading a communal reciting of morning *dua*. He then listens to his students' reading of a daily assigned part of *Risalei Nur* and sometimes *The Emerald Hills of the Heart*. Right after having breakfast, he spends one or two hours explaining the passages of some primary Islamic literature to his students, then he enters into his room for a short rest until the *zuhur* prayer. After he performs the noon prayer and *tasbihat*, he has lunch and engages in conversation with people around him. Then, he works on his books and articles in his room. *Tasbihat* is again read after his *asr* prayer. He gives his *sohbet*, which becomes attractive hours for guests. Due to his doctor's instruction, he then uses around 20 minutes for an exercise on a treadmill machine. He spends 45 minutes until the *magrib* prayer for a communal *dua* with people. After the prayer, *tasbihat* and dinner, he shares his time with his associates. The *isha* prayer follows his rest in bed, but he sleeps only a little, since it frequently occurs that he spends about one hour of preparation to sleep 30 minutes.<sup>397</sup>

This is the habitual and persistent daily life of Gülen in America with minor exceptional occasions like going out for a medical treatment. Other earlier sources also record a similar lifestyle with minor changes.<sup>398</sup> Further, all of these reports point out practices that constitute essential components of Gülen's daily life. Such practices as prayer, *dua*, *tasbihat*, teaching and *sohbet* are observed as indispensable elements in his

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<sup>397</sup> Said Tunçpınar, "Hocaefendi'de İsrafa Karşı Tavrı" [The Attitude of Hocaefendi Against Wasting], from [http://www.herkul.org/yazarlar/index.php?view=article&article\\_id=3892](http://www.herkul.org/yazarlar/index.php?view=article&article_id=3892) (accessed in September 30, 2007).

<sup>398</sup> See, for instance, Sarıtoprak, "Fethullah Gülen: A Sufi in His Own Way," 167-168. A comparative look at these sources clarifies a minor change of his daily life, which results from his health problem.

life. All these elements inclusively indicate Gülen’s simple, ascetic and pious lifestyle of to the extent that a close analysis of these elements would reveal Sufi qualities.

### *Ascetic life*

First of all, Gülen’s daily life is filled with prayer, dua and *tasbehat*. In particular, he is said to have recited and memorized the litanies known as *Jawshan* and *al-Qulub al-Daria* from *Majmu’at al-Ahzab* at least one hour per day. *Majmuat al-Ahzab* is a three volume collection compiled by the celebrated Ottoman Naqshbandi shaykh, Ziyaettin Gümüřhanevi (d. 1893).<sup>399</sup> As a collection of dua and dhikr, *Al-Qulub al-Daria* (Imploring Hearts) is a revised version of *Majmuat al-Ahzab* compiled and classified by Gülen.<sup>400</sup> This litany includes supplications of Imam Ghazali, Abd al-Qadir Jilani, Ahmad Rufai, Hasan Shadhali, Shah Naqshband, Muhyi al-Din ibn Arabi, Imam Rabbani and others. *Majmuat al-Ahzab* includes *Jawshan*, on which there has been an ongoing debate. According to Gülen, since *Jawshan* comes from primarily Shi’i sources, Sunni Muslims tend to be apathetic to it.<sup>401</sup> However, he affirms that “*Jawshan* initially came to the Prophet through inspiration or revelation, and then reaches us by one of the people of faith who received it from the Prophet by means of *kashf* (revelation or uncovering).<sup>402</sup>

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<sup>399</sup> Algar, “Sufism and Tarikat,” 217. For a recent version, see, Ahmed Ziyaeddin Gümüřhanevi, *Qulub al-Daria*, Istanbul: Iřık Yayınları. 2005). For Gümüřhanevi’s life and thought, see, İrfan Gündüz, *Gümüřhanevi Ahmed Ziyüiddin (KS): Hayatı, Eserleri, Tarikat Anlayıřı ve Halidiyye Tarikatı* (Istanbul: Seha Neřriyat, 1984).

<sup>400</sup> See, Gülen, *El-Kulubu'd-Daria*, (Define Yayınları).

<sup>401</sup> Gülen, “Cevřen, Hâlisâne Yapılmış Bir Duadır,” *Zaman*, 26 October 2007.

<sup>402</sup> Ibid.

Entrusting *kashf* and *ilham* as a source of knowledge, Gülen points out the wide usage of *Jawshan* among such great saints as Ghazali, Gümüşhanevî and Nursi. From this perspective, for him, *Jawshan* is a dua, whose every single sentence and word drop by drop leads one to a sincere and pious invocation.<sup>403</sup>

Perhaps, Gülen's strong upholding of asceticism throughout his life is his most vivid Sufi-nuanced lifestyle. As noted in the discussion about his life, asceticism is one of the main features of his life from his family background to his later period of *hizmet*. Among many ascetic aspects, his sustenance of 'little sleep, little eat and little talk' is easily noticeable. Along with his passing many sleepless nights, he is said to have eaten little - for instance, a soup for a dinner.<sup>404</sup> Although his innumerable sermons and *sohbets* may lead one to consider him talkative, Gülen has a strong tendency to talk only in necessary situations, keeping his speech, in almost all cases, focused with respect to Islam and *hizmet*. Certainly, this lifestyle reflects the typical Sufi conduct of *qillat al-ta'am, qillat al-manam wa qillat al-kalam* (little food, little sleep and little talk). In a similar sense that many Sufis maintain this code of conduct for training *an-nafs al-ammara bi's su*, the soul commanding to evil, Gülen rationalizes his austere life as a self-purification by the annihilation of the evil-commanding self. To this extent, for Gülen, *nefis terbiyesi* (self-training) means *nefis riyazet* (austerity of self). Further, Gülen categorizes two types of austerity; "The first is "austerity in manners," which means being freed from weaknesses and vices in order to acquire a second nature, while the

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<sup>403</sup> Ibid.

<sup>404</sup> Tunçpınar, "Hocaefendi'de İsrafa Karşı Tavrı."

other is “austerity in goals,” which means having the best goal and pursuing it in this world.”<sup>405</sup> This approach to Sufi asceticism - ‘having best goal and pursuing it in this world’ - appears not only in Gülen’s ascetic practice but also in his self-discipline. His simple and persistent daily timetable as represented in the aforementioned report illustrates how Gülen effectively manages his given time of a day to meet his self-imposed goal of personal piety and *hizmet*. As noted earlier, he imposed a doctrine of self-discipline as one of the tripod pillars of his educational program. Although Gülen paralleled it with a military system, self-discipline also has a certain connection to Sufism. In his explanation of a Sufi concept of time or *waqt*, Gülen underlines that a Sufi is called “a child of the moment.”<sup>406</sup> In light of Rumi’s words, he clarifies “a child of the moment” in that Sufis are expected to use all their time in the most profitable way possible for doing best in God’s sight and to “use all times and opportunities given by God as if each were a seed capable of producing seven or seventy or seven hundred grains.”<sup>407</sup> This appropriation is closely relevant to his use of time in a disciplined and effective way for his *hizmet*.

Further, this Sufi-nuanced practice of ‘for the best goal in this world’ gives a clue to Gülen’s celibacy. His biography narrates his strong rejection of marriage proposals twice when he was around the ages of 22 and 30. He remembers to have said stubbornly “I do not have any thought of that (marriage) from the beginning to the end.”<sup>408</sup> In reality,

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<sup>405</sup> Gülen, *Emerald Hills of the Heart* 2, 4.

<sup>406</sup> *Ibid*, 88-89.

<sup>407</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>408</sup> Gülen, “Edirne’ye Dönüş,” in en.fgulen.com.

since then, Gülen has remained celibate. As Saritoprak points out, Gülen's answer to Nursi's celibacy, which he said "the suffering of the Islamic community is more than enough, I haven't found a time to think of myself"<sup>409</sup> may be related to the reason of Gülen's celibacy. As it reads, Gülen must have had in mind a better or best goal than any other works including married life. It is certain that his self-imposed goal is *hizmet* for humanity. This aspect of Gülen's non-marriage status is comparable to that of Rabia al-Adawiyya (d. 801), the renowned woman Sufi. Her love is said to be directed toward God alone, as she insisted that "Marriage is obligatory for those who have the choice. But I do not have free choice for myself. I belong to my lord, and live in the shadow of His commands. I am of no account."<sup>410</sup> According to Schimmel, "Rabia's love of was absolute; there was no room left for any other thought or love. She did not marry, nor did she give the Prophet a special place in her piety. The world meant nothing to her. She would shut the windows in spring without looking at the flowers and become lost in the contemplation of Him who created flowers and springtime."<sup>411</sup> Compared to this picture of Rabia, whose celibacy shows an internal practice of Sufism, Gülen's non-marriage can be regarded to be an outer reflection and manifestation of love, as his *hizmet* for humanity and his placement of the Prophet as an ideal of *hizmet* indicate.

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<sup>409</sup> Saritoprak, "Fethullah Gülen: A Sufi in His Own Way," 166.

<sup>410</sup> See, David Brewster, "The Study of Sufism: Towards a methodology," *Journal of Religion and Religions* 6:11(1976), 39.

<sup>411</sup> Schimmel, *Mystical Dimensions*, 39.

## *Sohbet*

Gülen's style of sermon (*vaaz*) is also remarkable. As one can easily realize from his original Turkish sermons that are widespread and available through television, CDs and internet, his sermons are charismatic and unique. In fact, Gülen is a well-known sermonizer, whose preaching has been effective and appealing enough to mobilize and transform a considerable number of its listeners toward his Islamic worldview and in turn gained him the title of *hocaefendi*.<sup>412</sup> In the United States, he has not continued to preach public sermons mainly due to his health problem. However, Gülen has consistently given his *sohbet*. In his own style of preaching, *sohbet* appears as a daily-based, private and macro-level sermon with relatively small audience. Gülen's *sohbet* takes about an hour daily after the *asr* prayer. His audience consists of around 50 Turkish people, mostly his associates, who visit briefly (or a more specific estimate of time) from all over the world. In the beginning of *sohbet*, the visitors are offered a cup of tea and a mouthful of cake, quietly waiting for Gülen's words. Though *sohbet* is informal, its atmosphere is highly sincere, intellectual and spiritual. In general, it begins with questions and follows with Gülen's answers. Despite the fact that everyone can ask questions, most participants keep quiet and listen carefully to what Gülen says. They hesitate to ask questions due partly to their profound respect and partly to their concern not to make *Hocaefendi* repeat the same answers that he gave in different *sohbets* and works. Indeed, his followers from all over the world send many questions for Gülen to give an answer to each. Thus, not

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<sup>412</sup> See, Yavuz, *Islamic Political Identity in Turkey*, 183-4.

surprisingly, some of those questions are carefully chosen by one of Gülen's current students. These questions lead Gülen to make his daily *sohbet*.

*Sohbet* is a well circulated term in Sufism with a meaning of 'spiritual conversation or dialogue between master and disciple for a cleansing of the soul and a meeting of the hearts.' In the Naqshbandi tradition, *sohbet* along with *dhikr* (remembrance) and *rabita* (spiritual connection) is one of the central devotional practices with a specific function to secure a bond between masters and disciples.<sup>413</sup> In Gülen's rationale, *sohbet* refers to "making effective speeches to direct people to the Almighty" and "to guide hearts to eternity," as Yunus Emre says "what sets the soul right is the conversation of saints."<sup>414</sup> In this line, he considers *tekkes* as 'preserved institutions of speech and *sohbet*.'<sup>415</sup> As Gülen appreciates *sohbet* tradition in Sufism, his own *sohbet* participates with it in certain aspects. Just as it functions in the Naqshbandiyya, his *sohbet* has become in practice as a significant binding element of his community. For the vast majority of the faithful members of his movement, to listen directly to the *sohbet* of their *hocaefendi* is not a simple listening to an hour of preaching; far more importantly, it is to assure their psychological and communal bond with the *hocaefendi* and his movement. In this sense, Gülen's *sohbet* is ready-made and liable to be highly communal, spiritual and mystical, securing an adhesive relationship of his companionship. This aspect echoes the Naqshbandi *sohbet*, which, as Brian Silverstein describes, is "not orality per se that is

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<sup>413</sup> Brian Silverstein, "Mystic Speech in Modern Turkey: Voice and Text in the Practice of Islam," *Istanbul Almanach*, n. 5 (2001).

<sup>414</sup> Gülen, *Emerald Hills of the Heart* 2, 238.

<sup>415</sup> *Ibid*, 241.

valued here; rather it is the kinds of relationships that emerge in the act of oral transmission that are the object of careful cultivation.”<sup>416</sup> In spite of this functional commonality, there is a unique and significant aspect, which might be called ‘Gülen’s own *sohbet* style.’ Ergene’s study puts forward two distinctive dimensions of Gülen’s personality and his *sohbet*. To him, Gülen is an *alim* or an intellectual thinker who gains knowledge with rational and discursive approaches. Simultaneously, he is an *arif* or a gnostic whose knowledge comes from mystical inspiration and intuition (*irfan*). Accordingly, Ergene insists, Gülen preaches spiritually and heartedly as well as rationally.<sup>417</sup> In other words, the uniqueness of Gülen’s *sohbet* is a balanced and effective reflection of his rationality and spirituality (*alim* and *arif* dimensions). Specifically, its *arif* dimension, which might be called a ‘spiritual sermon,’ conveys Gülen’s spiritual-mystical experiences that are intrinsically linked to the Sufi source of spiritual knowledge, *ma’rifa*.<sup>418</sup> Certainly, these experiences are quite difficult to be rationally transmitted in language due to their ineffability. In this difficulty lies Gülen’s distinctive style of speech, which imparts effectively what he spiritually and mystically experiences and tastes by means of his intellectual knowledge. Unlike a sort of paradoxical conversation that many oral and literal tradition of Sufism display, his *sohbet* upholds direct expressions that consist of both intellectual and spiritual parts. Gülen harmonizes these two parts in his

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<sup>416</sup> Silverstein, “Mystic Speech in Modern Turkey.” For his comprehensive research on the Naqshbandi practice of *sohbet*, see, Brian Silverstein, *Mystical Discipline in Modern Turkey: Ethics of Speech in the Practice of Islam*, Ph. D diss. (Berkeley: University of California, 2002).

<sup>417</sup> Ergene, *Geleceğin Modern Çağa Tanıklığı*, 19-21.

<sup>418</sup> Gülen defines an *arif* as one who has spiritual knowledge of God in his/her travel to *ma’rifah* and so who feels indescribable spiritual pleasures and experiences. Gülen, *The Emerald Hills of the Heart I*, 147.



sohbet, which in turn touches a string in the intellect and the heart of listeners. The existence of many audiences of his speech, who keep continually weep and cry, demonstrates that Gülen's *sohbet* and sermons do not only appeal to audiences' intellect but also excite their heart and spirit.

### *Living environment*

Not only are his lifestyles discussed, but many elements of Gülen's daily life are also closely linked to his Sufi tendencies. As examples, one may well note his work on Sufism, *The Emerald Hills of the Heart*, which is one of the books in the reading circles following morning prayer. Further, Gülen had used for a long Ghazali's *Ihya al-Ulum al-Din* and Sirhindi's *al-Maktubat* as textbooks in his teaching curriculum to students who attended his learning circle.<sup>419</sup> The inspirational topics that these and other works excited him also constantly appeared in his daily *sohbet* for Islamic spirituality.

Remarkably, Gülen's living environment is not an exception to this embedded Sufism. The foremost is a term "the fifth floor" that is widely used among devotees of the Gülen movement. The fifth floor was the place where Gülen resided in Istanbul. It specifically refers to the top floor of his lodging at an educational institute (FEM institute) that located on a sloop of Çamlıca Mountain with a view of Marmara Ocean. Far beyond a descriptive adjective as a normal residential place, the fifth floor has been used as a proper noun - *Beşinci Kat* in Turkish - which carries special symbolic meanings to Gülen

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<sup>419</sup> See, Sarıtoprak and Sidney, "Fethullah Gülen and the People of the Book," 331.

and his devotees. Marcia Hermansen underlines *Beşinci Kat* as a symbol of ‘another world’ and ‘a sacred space,’ for instance, relating it to the Sufi sense of *Miraj* (the Prophet’s mystical experience of Ascension).<sup>420</sup> As Hermansen briefly mentions, Gülen reminiscently describes *Beşinci Kat* with a full spiritual and mystical tone from his own experiential reality to such an extent that only those who share the same feeling and experience can access. In his metaphorical words, it was as if not a human-made building but ‘a place that was gushed out from the depth of land containing many celestial secrets,’ ‘a lotus that knows to stay on waves of and further challenges to a giant ocean-like city that socks up everything in it’ and ‘a flower that emits the most charming and sweet scents to his spirit.’<sup>421</sup> Though it is hard to have an appropriate understanding for this metaphorical language, a contextual and relational approach gives a clue for a deconstruction of its symbolic meanings. In light of the discussion of his life in the previous section, Gülen’s metaphors here would possibly indicate a comfortable residential place that provides spiritual, religious and social atmosphere, refreshing him day-to-daily for his *hizmet* especially against the backdrop of media, military and Islamist attack. Perhaps, in this sense, he recalls:

I had a taste of the systematization of my daydreams for the first time in *Beşinci Kat*. I said to myself: this may well be the place of juncture of my previous imagination and my current dreams. In fact, so many times while living *Beşinci Kat*, my brain was ceased and rested. My thought was tightly sitting cross-legged. [Then] My heart reached and leaned upon the pleasure of an incomprehensible union (*vuslat*). And, I was perceiving there just as a platform to reach the Friend. So, the daydreams that were blooming like flowers from the deep of my spirit came to me like reflections of each glazed piece of the beauties of Paradise.<sup>422</sup>

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<sup>420</sup> Hermansen “Understanding of “Community” within the Gülen Movement.”

<sup>421</sup> Gülen, “Beşinci Kat-2,” *Sızıntı*, September 1997, 224.

<sup>422</sup> Gülen, “Beşinci Kat-1,” *Sızıntı*, August 1997, 223.

A contextual analysis makes it possible to read the ‘systematization of his dreams’ in the context of the bloom of his movement and *hizmet* since the mid-1980’s. This was a period of bliss, which occluded Gülen’s mystical experience of the Sufi-nuanced spiritual journey. Thus, these contextual and mystical aspects of *Beşinci Kat*, not surprisingly, end up with his strong appropriation of it, such as: “[I]n my memory, *Beşinci Kat* is the only place that always exists with the most profound imprints. Mainly in this place occurred the most intensive *muraqaba* and *muhasaba* of mine.”<sup>423</sup> To account for this passage, it is necessary to look at Gülen’s definition of *muraqaba* and *muhasaba*. In his *Emerald Hills of the Heart*, Gülen considers *muraqaba* (self-supervision) and *muhasaba* (self-criticism or self-interrogation) as consecutive Sufi concepts. While the former is “watching, supervising, controlling, and living in the consciousness of being controlled (by God),” the latter, as one of its most important mechanisms, refers to “the self-criticism of a believer who constantly analyzes his or her deeds and thoughts in the hope that correcting them will bring him or her closer to God.”<sup>424</sup> In conjunction, then, the passage can be read as an indication that while residing in *Beşinci Kat*, Gülen internalized and exercised most profoundly *muraqaba* and *muhasaba* to deepen and purify his Islamic spirituality and religiosity toward ‘the All-Seeing, the All-Hearing, the All-Knowing’ Divine sanction of his conduct of *hizmet*.

Furthermore, *Beşinci Kat* is not only a personal spiritual place of Gülen but a social and communal center of his *hizmet* as well. In his memory, its most important and

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<sup>423</sup> Gülen, “Beşinci Kat-2.”

<sup>424</sup> Gülen, *The Emerald Hills of the Heart* 1, 6 and 57.

beautiful element was “blessed inhabitants,” who did *hizmet* filled with the pleasure of hospitality to their visitors.<sup>425</sup> Indeed, those who lived in the building with Gülen were his close associates and his own students, and these core members of the Gülen movement did their best to actualize Gülen’s ideal of ‘internalization and externalization’ of faith. In this way, they enlivened *Beşinci Kat* as a center of their social relations for *hizmet*. Building on this initial understanding, *Beşinci Kat* has eventually come to be known as an axis of collective identity of the devotees of the Gülen *hizmet*. This communal aspect of *Beşinci Kat* together with its status as the *hocaefendi*’s residency continues to animate *Beşinci Kat* in the insiders’ mind with a spiritual symbolism,<sup>426</sup> as Gülen states: “[Everything in it] reminded [me of] innumerable vital events and a great number of visitors. It was like an encoded album in that hundreds of memories were compressed into a diskette. For this reason, everything in it should be regarded in respect to secretly-encoded remembrances, not from the perspective of their individual values... I believe, the memories of *Beşinci Kat* will be evaluated absolutely in this way, since a picture of every dream in this place becomes widened with the remembrance and comes to be a realization of imagined nation that opens to all places and times.”<sup>427</sup>

As such, in Gülen’s symbolism, *Beşinci Kat* is *a being*, which, far beyond its exoteric meaning of *a thing*, has been very much alive in the communal consciousness of the movement. In a more direct expression, it is a living representation that continually

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<sup>425</sup> Gülen, “Beşinci Kat-1.”

<sup>426</sup> Hermansen briefly notes this aspect as well; Hermansen, “Understandings of ‘Community’ within the Gülen Movement.”

<sup>427</sup> Gülen, “Beşinci Kat-2.”

incorporates Gülen's spiritual/mystical depth. Thus, *Beşinci Kat* also becomes a representative of spiritual retreat places. To a certain extent, his current residency on a slope of the Pocono Mountains might be linked to the spiritual symbolism of *Beşinci Kat*. In fact, this place is officially a religious retreat camp namely "Golden Generation Worship and Retreat Center," which is used for the practical purpose of spiritual refreshment of visiting members of the Gülen movement from all over the world. Despite their short period of duration there, they are offered a time to separate themselves from their mundane life and to reflect on their religiosity through intensive praying including *nafile* prayers like *tahajjud*, continually reciting *dua* and *dhikr*, reading books and listening to Gülen's daily *sohbet*. The camp environment, which is located deep in a rural area and is well covered with abundant trees, provides its inhabitants and visitors an atmosphere of a spiritual retreat. Interestingly, many of the rooms in the ten houses on the property are labeled with assigned names from Sufi terminology such as *Muraqaba*, *Muhasaba* and *Muhabba*. These names remind visitors that this is an Islamic retreat place.

### *Mystical experiences*

Last but not least, Gülen's mystical experience gives a notable account of his Sufi-linked lifestyle. Obviously, a holistic look at Gülen's Islamic vision makes one hesitate to consider his mystical experience at a primary level. As Thomas Michel rightly points out and as will be detailed in the next chapter, unlike some Sufis who greatly rely on and emphasize the ecstatic or para-normal mystical experiences, Gülen is much concerned with pragmatic aspects of Sufism as a means of guiding Muslims to internalize

Islamic spirituality.<sup>428</sup> Nonetheless, concurring with a general acceptance that Sufi religiosity is essentially oriented toward the spiritual life and mystical experience, Gülen's religious experience still remains an important component of his life. As he makes it clear, it plays a role as a source of knowledge, as a sign of divine guidance and furthermore as an indication of his charismatic sainthood among the members of his movement. The above discussion of Gülen's lifestyle gives a strong sense of his mystical orientation, which is intrinsic to his *arif* identity. As an *arif* or a mystic, Gülen explicitly entrusts *kashf* and *ilham* (inspiration) as sources of knowledge that come from spiritual intuition (*irfan*) through mystical experiences. For him, among several sources of knowledge, "God-inspired knowledge" occupies the highest rank.<sup>429</sup> This knowledge is "a special gift from God" and "a kind of illumination," which one cannot *acquire* by studying or being taught by others, but can *find* in his or her heart. Such a discovering comes from a sacred source and is a fruit of strict observation and alert reflection on its teachings. As a close look reveals, this recognition lies at the center of all Gülen's spiritual-focused lifestyle informing, as discussed above, his asceticism, recitation of dua and dhikr, *sohbet*, and even his living environment. Specifically, in his writings and sermons, Gülen straightforwardly admits that a good portion of his thought and behaviors comes from an inspiration that springs out from his spirituality.<sup>430</sup>

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<sup>428</sup> Thomas Michel, "Sufism and Modernity in the Thought of Fethullah Gülen," 348.

<sup>429</sup> See, Gülen, *The Emerald Hills of the Heart* 2, 18-25.

<sup>430</sup> Gülen's expression "ruhuma ilham ettiđi" [inspired to my spirituality] is one of frequently observable expressions of his sermons and writings.

In this context, Gülen recalls his mystical experiences, which appeared in various shapes and in many occasions. For example, Gülen narrates his first pilgrimage in Mecca including an experience of hearing a voice of Satan or devil that tempted him to do harm to himself while he was reciting *dhikr* and *wird*.<sup>431</sup> In another occasion, he relates his humble attitude concerning his *hizmet* to the passage of a book that he unexpectedly opened and read. The passage, which records a hadith “God strengthens this religion even through a sinful man,” addressed the situation that he just initiated his *hizmet* as a social movement; it inspired him with a necessity to uphold humility and keep his carnal self pure against feeling pride in his *hizmet*.<sup>432</sup> During the military coup of 1971, in which police raids upon him disrupted the formation of his *hizmet*, Gülen experienced an accident in which his car hit dogs on a street. Reading this accident as a sign, Gülen would eventually avoid the raids.<sup>433</sup> In addition, his extremely strange and uneasy feelings were also interpreted as intuitive signs of imminent raids. In one passage, he notes how the severe beating of his heart guided him to bypass a police inspection. Among these sorts of his experiences, the most striking is one that happened in the period of the early camps in the mid-1960’s. This experience is well-known to his movement with respect to his dua called *Ashab al-Badr* (Companions of the war of *Badr*). Gülen narrates:

[A]fter lunch, I was reading *Ashab al-Badr*, leaning my back against the pillar of a tent. My mind was in a state of, as the old people said, ‘between sleep and awake.’ [In it] I saw an army, which stationed on the side of field of the camp by holding a flag and lances in

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<sup>431</sup> Erdoğan, *Küçük Dünyam*, 128.

<sup>432</sup> Ibid, 108.

<sup>433</sup> Ibid, 136-37.

their hands. I cannot know whether someone said it or I understood that way or they said 'we are *Ashab al-Badr*.' Yet, I came to know that they were *Ashab al-Badr*. From behind the casing of the door, I was watching them with such a great admiration that the place became all of sudden like a door of a citadel. One of them swung his iron spear in a way demonstrating his power, and pierced the door and passed through it. With an awful excitement, I woke up.<sup>434</sup>

During the time at the camps, Gülen had several similar dreams. In some dreams, he saw himself even among *Ashab al-Badr*, within whom he could recognize Hamza ibn 'Abd al-Muttalib, the uncle of the Prophet. These dreams followed an immediate effect, in which Gülen observed an accident that cars were completely destroyed on the way to the camp. Having learned that the cars belonged to a group of people who tried to oppress the camp activities, Gülen linked this accident to the dream: "The thrown iron spear intimated this result as a sign from 'the world of likeness' (*Alam al-misal*). The appearance of the door was a mark of blessing. That is just as the master of this mini-dream tells to its people, 'you are under blessing and protection. When your action, thought and feeling are one and when you follow the same Prophet, time and ages cannot separate us from you. We are together even if one of us in the world, one in the other world (*Uqba*), one in the West and one in the East."<sup>435</sup> Just as in this self-granted interpretation of the dream, Gülen had a series of consequent and supportive experiences, which indicate a realization of the dream as a protection of him and his *hizmet* both from 'jinn and mankind.' For instance, Gülen tells how mysteriously his dua for God in the name of Hamza and his exalted spirit rescued him and his associates from a big timber that was about to fall upon his car. He further adds a story about how the dua litany with

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<sup>434</sup> Gülen, "Berzahi Tablolar," in *Varligin Metafizik Boyutu* (Izmir: Nil., 1998).

<sup>435</sup> Ibid.



the names of *Ashab al-Badr* that he gave a lady with a serious illness protected her from jinns and their causing distraction. According to Gülen, this series of mystical experiences inspired him to include the names of *Ashab al-Badr* and *Uhud* martyrs to the dua litany by believing that “if it is sincerely recited, God would send sacred spirits like angels for a help.”<sup>436</sup>

To account for these mystical experiences of Gülen that bear a number of significant implications, it may be useful to analyze them from the perspective of a modern academic discourse on mystical experiences. The discussion, which has been greatly advanced from William James’ groundbreaking study, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature*,<sup>437</sup> provides a meaningful tool for an in-depth understanding of Gülen’s experiences. Specifically, James’ distinction of sudden and gradual experience, his privileging of the sudden type, and his consideration of mysticism as the root of religious experience are relevant here.

To begin with, James distinguishes two types of religious experiences, ‘a sudden, passive and emotional one and a gradual, active and intellectual type.’ Putting these two types in a dichotomous parallel, he contends that a sudden, passive and emotional experience is processed and actualized not by the concerned person’s intellectual, active and continuous efforts but by one’s ‘subconsciousness.’ Certainly, James gives a preference to the sudden experience rather than the gradual one, reasoning that the sudden type is indicative of forces acting in the subconscious or the subliminal region of

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<sup>436</sup> Gülen, “Kamplar Geleceğin Dünyası,” in en.fgulen.com

<sup>437</sup> William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature* (New York, Prometheus Books, 2002).

human psyche. Here by ‘sudden,’ James is concerned with ‘the twinkling of an eye’ – a minute-long concern not a day-lasting event; that is to say, it is *there*, just as is the new *light* of a religious experience.<sup>438</sup> For his part, the “root and center” of religious experience is mysticism, which has four “marks”: mystical experiences are ineffable, defying description, thus cannot be readily transferred to others; they are *noetic*, revelatory insight and knowledge is gained; they are *transient*, they do not last long; and the mystic is a *passive though conscious* recipient whose will is in abeyance to the experience.<sup>439</sup> This type of religious experience has led a number of scholars to characterize it as ‘passive-subject’ type as opposed to ‘active-subject’ type.<sup>440</sup> Concurrent with this consideration, James sees such experiences as pre-religious and further lays out a dichotomous distinction between religious people, that is, the healthy-minded or once-born, and the sick-soul or twice-born. For him, religious experience is apt to occur in the personality of the sick soul or the divided self, who is so easily and deeply burdened with a sense of religious sinfulness or a feeling of moral and intellectual incompleteness of varying intensity that he or she suffers from various kinds and degrees of psychosomatic illness. It is this illness such as melancholia that precipitates and triggers a religious experience, whereby the sick soul and the divided self become unified and happy.<sup>441</sup> As his empirical subject, James takes note of Sufism and finds Ghazali’s mystical experience

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<sup>438</sup> Ibid, 189.

<sup>439</sup> Ibid, 299-301.

<sup>440</sup> For instance, see, James Richardson, “The active vs passive convert: paradigm conflict in conversion recruitment research,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 24 (1985), 163-179.

<sup>441</sup> James, *The Varieties*, 127-144.

representative and convincing evidence for his own typology of mysticism.<sup>442</sup> In fact, Ghazali's life and religious experience, as delineated in his autobiography, *Al-Munkidh min Al-dalal* (Deliverance from Error), is by no means short of supporting this view of James. Ghazali, a religious genius or saint, is said to have suffered from his sick soul and divided self, which caused him two inner crises. He was finally delivered from the sick soul through mystical experience in a Divine light that he felt and accepted as the greater part of knowledge.<sup>443</sup>

Gülen's case, however, seems to discredit James' theory, as his biography reports neither a feeling of intellectual incompleteness nor a sense of a religious sinfulness. Specifically, unlike Ghazali's dramatic experience, nowhere in Gülen's life does one find either a sick soul or a divided self. Gülen's experience also differentiates itself from that of Said Nursi, who is regarded as his spiritual mentor. In his masterpiece of *Risalei Nur*, Nursi divides his life into two parts, 'old Said' and 'new Said,' according to his intense experience in a spiritual awakening that "Suddenly, through God's mercy and munificence, the sacred wisdom of the Qur'an came to my assistance."<sup>444</sup> In Gülen, this sort of intellectual and spiritual inquiry of incompleteness does not manifest. Rather, his biography observes a consistent life, in which his mystical experiences did not serve as a turning point to dramatically change all his life in 'the twinkle of an eye,' but rather frequently occurred and inspired Gülen to cope with circumstances by causing a gradual

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<sup>442</sup> In the *Varieties*, James briefly reviews al-Ghazali's life indirectly from *al-Munkidh*, citing from a secondary source, that is, Schmolders' partial translation of *al-Munkidh* in French; see, *ibid*, 404-405.

<sup>443</sup> See, Al-Ghazali, *The Faith and Practice of Al-Ghazali*, trans. W. Montgomery Watt (Chicago: Kazi Publications, 1982).

<sup>444</sup> Said Nursi, *Risalei Nur Kulliyati*, (Istanbul: Nesil Basim Yayin, 1996), 711.

inner transformation toward a steady advance of his faith and spirituality. In this sense and in light of what Gülen himself testifies, his religious experience does not presage a psychosomatic illness but occurs as an interactive reflection of his knowledge applied to the social context.

Gülen's reflections upon experience further raise a question of the Jamesian ideal of the sudden-type religious experience, which advances individual mystical experiences at the expense of religious institutions. By denoting 'immediate sudden experience' as a kind of 'passively received intuition,' James holds that religious experience comprises forms of experience uninfluenced by religious ideas, doctrines and beliefs. However, this arbitrary exclusion of religious institutions is not supported by the experiences of neither Ghazali nor Nursi. Instead, what is common in both Islamic ulama is their accumulated advanced knowledge of Islam and Sufism, which made it possible to trigger their Islamic mystical experiences. As their respective biographies point out, prior to their spiritual experiences both already knew and were further convinced, albeit slightly different in degree, of Sufi spiritual experience as a way to 'taste' and acquire certain knowledge. Gülen's religious orientation does not much differ from them. As remarked earlier, Gülen grew up in a Sufi environment that had led him to embed Sufism in his personality and spirituality, and he later internalized Sufism in his own worldview and hizmet. What follows this fact is that Sufism as a religious *institution* of Islam plays a key role for his later mystical experience. His life career as an *alim* since his early age reveals the Islamic influence on his mystical experience. In one remarkable instance, his dream of *Ashab al-Badr* and Hamza projects his Islamic knowledge on his actual life. This is to say that just as he is a very Islamic *alim*, so his experience happens within the fold of Islam in that it

cannot be understood isolated from Islam. In this sense, Gülen's mystical experiences indicate the Islamic orientation of his religiosity when they are rightly considered as a mirror of his deep knowledge and strong conviction of and sincere devotion to Islamic spirituality.

Gülen's in-time experience still reflects several aspects of the Jamesian sudden type. According to James, the conscious mind and the subliminal consciousness exist side by side within the human psyche. The subliminal consciousness, being the source of *dreams*, "unaccountable impulses," and "half-conscious systems,"<sup>445</sup> influences consciousness. Through sudden emotional or explosive occasions, a subconscious or half-conscious system may be potentiated, thus causing 'mental rearrangement.' This view parallels Gülen's characterization of being "between sleep and awake" in his dream, which represents the mutual connection of the conscious mind and the subliminal consciousness. Further, James' figuration of dream as rungs on a ladder of religious experience, which awaits the final rung for a mystic's feeling of oneness, immediacy and a momentary sense of nothingness,<sup>446</sup> corresponds to Gülen's experiential perception of 'impotence, poverty, and nothingness' as the path to annihilation in God.<sup>447</sup> As an immediate effect of a sudden type of experience, James asserts, "in the twinkling of an eye one is miraculously released."<sup>448</sup> That is, one has a strong feeling that the miraculous as a gift of God has occurred beyond human reason and activity at any rate and so one

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<sup>445</sup> James, *The Varieties*, 166.

<sup>446</sup> Ibid, 314.

<sup>447</sup> See, Gülen, *The Emerald Hills of the Heart 2*, 276-286.

<sup>448</sup> James, *The Varieties*, 188.

appreciates “the value of what God is pleased to do.”<sup>449</sup> In a similar way, Gülen accepts wholly his mystical experience as a divine guidance. For instance, he attributes his miraculous avoidance of a traffic accident to God who “employed such a sacred and sublime spirit and sent it for helping us.”<sup>450</sup>

Gülen’s biography observes not only this imminent effect of religious experience but also its long term impact on his life. Although his mystical experiences occurred occasionally and suddenly, their impact on his life is consistent and perpetual. In the short term, the experiences that mostly happened in Gülen’s critical moments served as inspirations for him to choose a proper path and as motivations to withstand hard times. As the experiences constantly appeared, in the long term, they were eventually instilled in Gülen’s conviction of his faith and *hizmet*. In the Jamesian schema of practical empiricism, this consequence of Gülen’s religious experience is a fruit that is linked to ‘moral helpfulness.’ James illustrates the most ethical and typical fruits of religious experience with those of saintliness. The salient features of saintliness are a sense of a personified “Ideal Power,” a self-surrender to the Power, a sense of liberty and ecstasy, and a system shift toward “emotional excitement” and boldness.<sup>451</sup> The consequences of this saintliness appear as a tendency toward asceticism and self-immolation, abandonment of fear and anxiety, purity from “worldly pursuits”, and charity or “brotherly love.”<sup>452</sup> To James, such irreducibly religious fruits are not only indispensable

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<sup>449</sup> Ibid, 189.

<sup>450</sup> Gülen, “Kamplar Geleceğin Dünyası.”

<sup>451</sup> Ibid, 220.

<sup>452</sup> Ibid, 225.

to the welfare of the world but also constitute an important criterion of religious experience. Gülen's experiences bear this fruit of saintliness with many tastes. Yet, significantly, the saintliness appears not in himself but in his movement. Perhaps due to his humbleness as inspired by the unexpected reading of the hadith, Gülen has never claimed his saintliness; nevertheless, his associates have had a firm confidence in his sainthood, at the center of which lies his mystical experiences. For instance, the dua litany, which Gülen's mystical experience led him to include the names of *Ashab al-Badr* and *Uhud* martyrs, is popularly read among the members of his movement, especially following Gülen's exhortation that "if it is sincerely recited, God would send sacred spirits like angels for a help."<sup>453</sup> In a similar way, he does not hesitate to articulate what he finds throughout his mystical experiences in order for his followers to reflect, consider and speculate their belief. As Yavuz contends, indeed, "many of Gülen's followers believe that he is guided by God through dreams and other events."<sup>454</sup> From this perspective, it is relevant to consider Gülen's mystical experience as a source of his charisma in the movement. As a matter of fact, the critics of him tend to interpret his mystical experience as an arbitrarily designed and instrumentalized tactic for his leadership.<sup>455</sup> However, as a careful look reveals, along with their apriori judgment from the negative image of Sufism and its orders, what they take for granted is an instinctive rejection of mystical experience. The Jamesian scholars counter this approach by

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<sup>453</sup> For a detail for Gülen's admonishment of reading the dua litany, see, Gülen, *İnancın Gölgesinde I* (Izmir: Nil, 2002), 168-172.

<sup>454</sup> Yavuz, *Islamic Political Identity in Turkey*, 304.

<sup>455</sup> See, Ergun Poyraz, *Said-i Nursi'den Demirel ve Ecevit'e Fethullah'ın Gerçek Yüzü*, (Istanbul; Otopsi Yayınevi, 2000). 45-48.

insisting that mystical truths are authoritative to those who have such experiences - such experiences cannot be taken away, thus mystics are, in the sense of knowing, invulnerable; and that the very existence of mystical knowledge overthrows the universal authority of non-mystical knowledge - mystical truth is genuine and demonstrable.<sup>456</sup> Then, what is left for the outsiders of the experience to do is to both acknowledge and observe how it manifests itself extrinsically in a relevant and meaningful way to its authorities and through their relations to the world. In Gülen's case, what is the most importantly observable is that his mystical experience appears as a source of knowledge for himself and as his religious charisma in his relationship with his associates, which will be discussed further in Chapter 5.

The above analysis of Gülen's mystical experience from a Jamesian perspective makes it clear how deeply and distinctively Gülen's mystical experience interacts with his life. Noteworthy, its presage, process and consequence happen within the fold of Islam in tune with the social and cultural context. In this regard, Gülen's experience challenges the universal validity of James' theory regardless of religious institutions and their ideas, languages and doctrines. Instead, it illustrates how intrinsically Islam and Sufism cohere with Gülen's personal experience, indicating the existence of religious experience specific to Islam, or what several scholars have coined "Islamic religious experience."<sup>457</sup> Within certain general commonalities, however, Gülen's experience also

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<sup>456</sup> See, James, *The Varieties*, 332-336.

<sup>457</sup> For representative discussions on this terminology, see, Ismail Al-Faruqi, "Essence of Religious Experience in Islam," *Numen*, 20 D (1973), 186-201; and, Fouad Moughrabi, "Islam and Religious Experience," in *Handbook of Religious Experience*, ed., Ralph W. Hood, Jr., Birmingham (Ala: Religious Education Press, 1995), 72-86.



shows its own characteristics different from those of Ghazali and Nursi. This fact points out the ramifications of Islamic religious experience, which appear dynamically in time and space. Gülen's mystical experience is a contemporary one, which addresses his specific situations, greatly influences his Sufi convictions and appeals to the contemporary minds of his movement. Significantly, it is a living experience notwithstanding the negative image of Sufism and the tariqa-associated accusation against him. As a living experience, it illustrates the profound involvement of Sufism in Gülen's life and lifestyle.

In almost all significant aspects, this analysis of Gülen's mystical experience crystallizes the primary contention of this chapter - the formative role of Sufism in Gülen's life. Having been greatly influenced by the regional cultural environment and informed by the great Sufis, his life manifests a profound respect for Sufism; a deep assimilation of its worldview; and an ascetic and pious lifestyle intrinsically associated with Sufism. This portrayal of Gülen's life reflects his statement underlined as the opening word of this chapter, which considers Sufism as the spiritual life of Islam that was representatively practiced by the Prophet and his Companions. In this connection, this chapter also depicts Islamic, humanitarian and pragmatic Sufism as embedded in and manifested through his life. On this basis, the following chapter will examine Gülen's thought of Sufism. Specifically, I will analyze how and to what extent Sufism embedded in his life are rationalized in his thought. This analysis will clarify the distinctive aspects of Gülen's Sufism, demonstrating that he not only internalizes Sufism but further recasts and advances it in accordance with contemporary needs.

## CHAPTER 4

### THE NATURE OF SUFISM IN GÜLEN'S THOUGHT

Sufism is the path followed by an individual who, having been able to free himself or herself from human vices and weaknesses in order to acquire angelic qualities and conduct pleasing to God, lives in accordance with the requirements of God's knowledge and love, and in the resulting spiritual delight that ensues. Sufism is based on observing even the most 'trivial' rules of the Shari'a in order to penetrate their inner meaning. - Fethullah Gülen<sup>458</sup>

The last chapter illustrated how deeply Sufism is embedded in and embodied by Fethullah Gülen's life. Despite his rejection of being associated with any tariqa, Gülen's life illuminates that he 'lives' in Sufism. In consonance with this life, Gülen highly appropriates Sufism as that "opposing this [Sufism] would be opposing the essence of Islam." Due to this strong tendency and appropriation, indeed, few scholars on Gülen fail to mention Sufism in characterizations of his life and thought. Greg Barton gives a representative voice of Gülen's Sufi orientation with an assertion that "virtually every aspect of Gülen's thought is shaped by Sufism and by its emphasis on motive, intention and the heart rather than outward conformity to law."<sup>459</sup> However, as his Sufi identity continues to occupy the relevant academia as a critical debated issue, Gülen's approach to Sufism needs to be much clarified especially with respect to the traditional and contemporary Sufism.

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<sup>458</sup> Gülen, *Emerald Hills of the Heart 1, 2*.

<sup>459</sup> Greg Barton, "Progressive Islamic Thought, Civil Society and the Gülen Movement in the National Context: Parallels With Indonesia," paper presented at the conference, *Islam in the Contemporary World: The Fethullah Gülen Movement in Thought and Practice*, (Rice University, 2005). Available online at [en.fgulen.com](http://en.fgulen.com).

This chapter will examine how Gülen conceptualizes and rationalizes his embedded Sufic life in his thought. In other words, it will focus on what and how he ‘speaks’ about Sufism in which he ‘lives.’ What specific Sufism shapes Gülen’s thoughts? How does Gülen define and describe Sufism? Is his idea of Sufism different from that defined by other Sufis, scholars and/or critics like western orientalist and Muslim fundamentalists? Put simply, what Sufism is he talking about? These questions are the main concern of this chapter, “The nature of Sufism in Gülen’s thought.”

In order to find the proper answers to the questions, I approach the topic in three parts. The first section concerns Sufism in Gülen’s works. As it is necessary to examine his writings to account for his idea of Sufism, this section will clarify his religious orientation and heritage. I will contend that although Gülen owes a heavy debt to the existing Sufis, his idea of Sufism is nevertheless distinctive. The detailed examination of this distinctiveness will follow in the next section, which takes Gülen’s Sufism from a characteristic focus. As a concluding remark, I will re-assess the cliché but still highly controversial question of whether he is a Sufi. This re-examination is significant, as it will provide the location of Gülen’s Sufism in the tradition and make salient its distinctiveness.

#### 4. 1. Sufism in Gülen's Works

##### *General account*

Fethullah Gülen is a prolific writer who has so far authored around forty books, each of which projects his own perspective on Islamic values and transmits his beliefs concerning contemporary issues. Just as in his life career and lifestyle deeply rooted in Sufism, it is easy to detect Sufism to be the most dominant element in his works and in his intellectual framework. At first sight, his works may be misleading as they seem to be distanced from Sufism. Except for his *The Emerald Hills of Heart: Key Concepts in the Practice of Sufism*, the only study that directs itself to Sufism, all other works do not explicitly deal with Sufi-related topics.

Certainly, in the early educational activities since the mid 1960's, Gülen did not handle Sufism as a distinct discipline. Having rarely evoked Sufi language, he preferred to use broadly understood terms such as faith, piety, charity and hard work. Yet, still at the center of these generic terms as apparent in his early sermons and writings until 1986 lies spirituality with examples from the lives of the Prophet and earlier ascetics. After 1986 when he gained national recognition, Gülen's references to Sufism became more noticeable in his sermons. The following years observe the turning of Gülen's focus to conceptualizing Sufism with a systematic approach to Sufi terminology. Since 1990, his interpretive evaluation of different concepts in Sufi terminology began to be published in the movement's monthly magazine *Sızıntı* under the general title of "On the Emerald Hills of the Heart."

Gülen's writings display that his intellectual and spiritual orientation is anchored in his perception of Sufism – its principle, history, limitation and goal. As Ali Ünal underlines, the meaning and contents of Gülen's works, more than any other aspects, stand on Islamic Sufism and spiritual life as represented by the great Sufis.<sup>460</sup> Indeed, his writings on Sufism are replete with concepts already established by earlier Sufi authorities. To a certain degree, it seems obvious that Gülen does not create new approaches nor does he bring new definitions to Sufi concepts. However, this indebtedness is not a reminiscence of *taqlid* or imitation, which predominated over *ijtihad* or deductive thinking in the traditionally structured system of master-disciple relationship in many tariqas. Instead, as Gülen identifies *ijtihad* as a source of Sufism, his writings are results of his active interpretation of Islam in tune with contemporary contexts. This constitutes the distinctiveness of Gülen's Sufism. In other words, Gülen takes off where earlier Sufis left; it takes their thoughts further in the direction of the practical application of Sufism in order to actualize the 'spiritual recreation' of contemporary minds. To understand this distinctive aspect of Gülen's Sufism necessitates the identification of Sufis who have exercised an influence upon Gülen. Specifically, a close count of the names of the influential Sufis that Gülen refers to the most in his works makes it possible to group them under two categories, cultural and intellectual heritage.

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<sup>460</sup> Ali Ünal, Suat Yıldırım and Mehmet Ergene. *M. Fethullah Gülen: Bir Portre Denemesi* (Istanbul: Nil Yayınları. 2002).

### *Cultural and intellectual heritage*

The first Sufi group includes Ahmad Yasawi, Jalal al-Din Rumi, Yunus Emre, Hajji Bektash Veli, Niyazi Misri (d. 1694), Ibrahim Haqqi of Erzurum (d. 1780) and Muhammad Lutfi Efendi. These names of Turkish Sufis are constantly appropriated as Gülen's primary references to Islam in general and Turkish Islam in particular. To Gülen, they all maintain a common teaching of tolerance, love and humanism. His reading of the Sufis as saints and heroes of love and tolerance leads Gülen to define Islam as "a religion of forgiveness, pardon, and tolerance."<sup>461</sup> Thus, his writing on tolerance, dialogue and humanism directs itself to their teachings.

Despite its significance, Gülen's writings are not limited within the national boundary of Turkish Sufism. Rather, they broadly cover the thoughts of many non-Turkish Sufis. While Gülen takes the former as the culturally embedded Turkish collectiveness of humanitarian love, he refers to the latter for his own personal choice, clarifying his intellectual orientation. Consequently, to identify these Sufis is as important as to retrieve the cultural root of Gülen's thought, as it would illuminate the meaning and direction of his project. Gülen's writings include a good number of Sufi thinkers such as al-Hasan al-Basr (d. 728), Harith al-Muhasib (d. 857), Junayd al-Baghdadi (d. 910), Abu-Talib al-Makki (d. 996), Imam al-Ghazali (d. 1111), Ibn Arabi (d. 1240), Ahmad Faruqi Sirhindi (d. 1624), Shah Wali Allah al-Dihlawi (d. 1762) and Khalid al-Baghdadi (d.1827). More than any others whose names are mentioned in Gülen's writings, these

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<sup>461</sup> Gülen, *Toward a Global Civilization of Love and Tolerance*, 58.

renowned Sufi authorities seem to have mostly informed the shape of Gülen's intellectual frame. Among several insights that Gülen takes from each of them,<sup>462</sup> the most significant imprint is, as their names collectively indicate, Islamic Sunni Sufism. Indeed, as shown in their works, albeit in different degree, they all strive to bring together Sufism and the Shari'a, presenting the Qur'an and the Sunna as the primary source of Sufism and setting aside non-Shari'a oriented practices of some mystic circles. A considerable number of passages in Gülen's works relate these Sufis to the sanction of Sufism within Islamic tenets. As some readily noticeable instances, Gülen adduces Kalabazi's *Al-Ta'arruf li-Madhhab Ahl al-Sufi*, al-Tusi's *Al-Luma*, Abu Talib al-Makki's *Qut al-Qulub*, al-Qushayri's *Al-Risala al-Qushayri* and al-Ghazzali's *Ihya al-Ulum Din* for his contention that "real, perfected Sufis have always depended on the basic principles of the Shari'a and have based their thoughts on the Qur'an and the Sunna."<sup>463</sup> By the same token, elsewhere, he underlines Junayd al-Baghdadi's saying "Anyone who does not know the Book and the Sunna is not to be followed as a guide."<sup>464</sup>

The cultural and intellectual heritage expressed in Gülen's writings provides an important foundation for his religious orientation. Regarding this examination of heritage, two points must be clarified. First, my approach to classifying the influential Sufis into the two groups is personal and arbitrary. It is predicated upon the categorical convenience of cultural and intellectual influences coinciding with Gülen's primary concern with

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<sup>462</sup> A comprehensive and detailed examination of each of these Sufi scholars in Gülen's thought needs a separate study, which is beyond the scope of this dissertation.

<sup>463</sup> Gülen, *The Emerald Hills of the Heart 1*, xx.

<sup>464</sup> Gülen, *The Emerald Hills of the Heart 2*, 21.

Turkish Islam. Nonetheless, it is significant to note that in Gülen's thought, the two seemingly parallel heritage join at the point of humanitarian Islamic Sufism. That is, the Turkish and the non-Turkish Sufis are not exclusively and representatively assigned for either Shari'a-based or inclusive Sufism. Rather, in Gülen's writings, they overlap each other in both dimensions. For instance, Gülen depicts Jalal al-Din Rumi as a foremost saint of the Shari'a and Sunni orthodoxy, while he portrays Ahmad Sirhindi, Khalid al-Baghdadi, and Shah Wali Allah al-Dahlawi as representative Sufis who state that "love is the ultimate station of the spiritual journey."<sup>465</sup> Second, the inclusive inspiration of the Sufis in Gülen's thought, however, is exclusively individual, carrying no sense of a communal connotation of tariqa. Truly, one may find considerable parallels between Gülen and the Naqshbandi order. The typical characteristics of the Naqshbandiyya with its Sunni-based, Shari'a-minded, sober, inward-looking disciplines and practices are analogous to Gülen's preferred perception of Sufism. Simultaneously, yet, there exist remarkable differences between the two. As noted earlier, Gülen approves neither the *silsila* or initiatic spiritual chain nor the strict master-disciple relationship, both of which are essential for the order. This fact precludes an attempt to establish a direct link between Gülen and the Naqshbandiyya. As Gülen's writings make it clear, the similarities between the two come out not due to the Naqshbandi influence as a tariqa on Gülen. Instead, they appear as an outcome of the coupled impact of individual Naqshi Sufis such as Ahmad Sirhindi, Khalid al-Baghdadi, Ahmet Ziyaeddin Gümüshanevi and the regional environment that the Naqshbandiyya has dominated not as a tariqa but as a

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<sup>465</sup> Gülen, "Love is the Essence of Creation," in en.fgulen.com.



cultural tradition. This aspect does not justify the argument for the influence of the Naqshbandi tariqa on Gülen's thought. Elizabeth Özdalga's accentuation of "the tradition of the Naqshbandi Sufi order" as a constitutive reference to Gülen's teachings<sup>466</sup> is ambiguous to the extent of misleading researchers, who, taking the reference uncritically, may assume a significant connection between the Naqshbandi order and Gülen's religious identity. On the contrary, just as Gülen's non-tariqa tendency is clear as remarked earlier, the non-tariqa influence is imperative for understanding Gülen's thought of Sufism, as will be detailed in the following section.

*Bediüzzaman Said Nursi*

Insofar as the influences of individual Sufis on Gülen's writings are concerned, Bediüzzaman Said Nursi's impact is no doubt foremost and determinant. As reviewed earlier, Gülen already decided in his age of adolescence to follow the way of the *Risalei Nur* and spend for its *hizmet* all his life. Since then, he has managed his life around the *Risalei Nur*, being eventually known as a leader of a Nur movement. Concurrent with this life career, Gülen calls Said Nursi with a highly respectful title of Üstad Bediüzzaman, the master and the sage of the age. He further considers Nursi as a *mujaddid* or reviver of religion, by whom "reviving the Companion's path was accomplished fully."<sup>467</sup> To this extent, it is no wonder that, as Sarıtoprak puts it, "Nursi's formative influence on Gülen's

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<sup>466</sup> Elisabeth Özdalga, "Worldly Asceticism in Islamic Casting," 91.

<sup>467</sup> Ünal and Williams, *Advocate of Dialogue*, 358. For an academic approach to the identity of Nursi as an mujaddid, see, Hamid Algar, "The Centennial Renewer: Bediüzzaman Said Nursi and the Tradition of Tajdid," *Journal of Islamic Studies* 12 (2001): 291-311.

thought, including his approach to Sufism, is well read by a simple note on Gülen's writings, which have much more references to Nursi's thoughts than any other thinkers"<sup>468</sup> It is true that Nursi did not author any individual book on his ideas of Sufism. However, his *Risalei Nur* collection does include a considerable number of Sufi concepts, clarifying his stance on Sufism. It is primarily through the perspective of the *Risalei Nur* that Gülen adopts Nursi's ideas on Sufism and re-evaluates the traditional Sufi literature. To Gülen, in sharp contrast to the claim that the *Risalei Nur* is far removed from Sufism, Islam's spiritual life lies in its essence where "the Sufic truth dripping from."<sup>469</sup> Such appreciation is apparent in Gülen's writings, in which he prototypically follows Nursi's footsteps in the most essential issues of Sufism. In fact, even in many passages where he makes no explicit reference to the *Risalei Nur*, it is not difficult to find Nursi's overarching influence on them. In one significant example, referring to and reflecting on Nursi's thought, Gülen considers Sufism as Islamic spirituality accumulated through the saints of Islam from the Prophet and his Companions to the later great Sufis, rather than as the institutionalized representations or Sufi orders open to deviations, defects and risks.<sup>470</sup> Thus, just as Nursi's *Risalei Nur*, Gülen's writings illustrate his firm stance on Sufism, while rejecting any tariqa-association.

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<sup>468</sup> Sarıtoprak, "Fethullah Gülen: A Sufi in His Own Way."

<sup>469</sup> Ünal and Williams, *Advocate of Dialogue*, 358.

<sup>470</sup> See, *ibid*, 358-359.

*Kalbin Zümriit Tepeleri* (The Emerald Hills of the Heart)

Gülen’s writings explicitly and inclusively show his spiritual and intellectual debt to many Sufis including Said Nursi. The immensity of their influence is such that Gülen does not regard himself to be an innovator in the field of Sufism. Instead of showcasing novel ideas, his writings draw the reader’s attention to the original sources. Gülen’s clarification of, for instance, Ghazali, Ahmad Sirhindi and Said Nursi as “the revivers or renewers of the highest degree who combined in their persons both the enlightenment of sages, knowledge of religious scholars and spirituality of the greatest saints”<sup>471</sup> encourages readers to look at those original works. In a more dramatic way, Gülen humbly lowers his own voice by stating that “*Kalbin Zümriit Tepeleri* (The Emerald Hills of the Heart) expresses an inadequate person’s feelings and thoughts in a weak style. Actually, as a theme, these matters can always be written in the light of the *Risale-i Nur*.”<sup>472</sup> In this regard, Gülen’s writings are certainly reflections on key ideas and values of the existing Sufi literature. Despite this heavy reliance, a close comparative examination reveals several prominent departing aspects of Gülen’s thought from those of the Sufis. Indeed, it is nothing but for this departure that Gülen elaborates his *The Emerald Hills of the Heart*, drawing out the characteristics of his own perception of Sufism.

Unlike Nursi, Gülen elucidates his idea of Sufism in a separate work entitled *Kalbin Zümriit Tepeleri*, which is published in English with the title *The Emerald Hills of*

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<sup>471</sup> Gülen, *Prophet Muhammad: The Infinite Light 2* (London: Truestar, 1998), 154.

<sup>472</sup> Ünal and Williams, *Advocate of Dialogue*, 359.

*The Heart: Key Concepts in the Practice of Sufism*. This book is compiled from Gülen's articles, dealing with various Sufi terms, which he has been contributing to the monthly magazine *Sizinti* since 1990.<sup>473</sup> It has been issued up to now with four volumes in Turkish (and two volumes in English). And, further publications are expected as Gülen continues to work on other Sufi terms. As Gülen's only work on Sufism, it constitutes the quintessence of his approach to the subject.

*The Emerald Hills of The Heart*, as its English subtitle *Key Concepts in the Practice of Sufism* indicates, is a comprehensive study of Sufi terminology. Unlike much literature dealing with historical, philosophical or psychological dimensions of Sufism, this study focuses on core Sufi concepts and terms including *hal/makam* (states/stations), *fana/baqa* (annihilation/subsistence), *wujud* (finding and existence), *zuhd* (asceticism), *ma'rifa* (knowledge of God), *walaya* (sainthood) and *al-insan al-kamil* (the universal man). Although these concepts are individually analyzed, they piece together a penetrating picture of how Gülen identifies Islamic spirituality with the intrinsic structure and attribute of Sufism. For this picture, each article that focuses on a concept follows, with minor exception, a common systematic formation, which consists of four basic components. It begins with a generic definition of a concept and its meaning in Sufism. It then provides the relevant verses of the Qur'an and Hadith. This is followed by diverse opinions of Sufi authorities on the concept, showing its different aspects or stages. Each article includes affluent couplets from Sufi poets such as Rumi, Yunus Emre, Niyaz Misri, Ibrahim Haqqi and Mehmed Lutfi.

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<sup>473</sup> Gülen's first Sufi article in *Sizinti* is on *Hal* or 'state,' which appears in *The Emerald Hills of the as Hal-Makam* (State-Station).

His explanation of *Qalb* or heart (*kalb* in Turkish) represents this formation. Briefly mentioning a biological description of the heart, Gülen provides connotations of the heart in the Sufi tradition such as the spiritual heart of an individual's real nature, the eye of the spirit or spiritual intellect, and the 'polished mirror' in which Divine knowledge is reflected. In his reading of Sufism, it is one's heart that God addresses and that undertakes responsibilities. In light of Ibrahim Haqqi's interpretation of a hadith that "He [God] is known and recognized as a 'Treasure' hidden in the heart by the heart itself," Gülen brings forward another aspect of the heart as "the direct, eloquent, most articulate, splendid, and truthful tongue of the knowledge of God."<sup>474</sup> Yet, since heart can be simultaneously "a means by which Satanic and carnal temptations and vices can enter," he points to the qur'anic advice that "Our Lord! Do not cause our hearts to swerve after You have guided us" (the Qur'an, 3:7). On this basis, Gülen states, "Belief is the life of heart; worship is the blood flowing in its veins; and reflection, self-supervision, and self-criticism are the foundations of its permanence."<sup>475</sup> He enriches his conclusion with a couplet from Rumi who says; "The Truth says: I consider the heart, Not the form made from water and clay. You say: I have a heart within me, whereas The heart is above God's Throne, not below."<sup>476</sup> This explanation of the heart not only typifies the formation of Gülen's study of Sufi terminology, but is further exemplified in the title *The Emerald Hills of the Heart*. As the title indicates, the heart is a central term in his conception of Sufism as important as it is for the Sufi tradition. In this sense, Gülen asserts:

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<sup>474</sup> Gülen, *The Emerald Hills of the Heart 1*, 24.

<sup>475</sup> *Ibid*, 26.

<sup>476</sup> *Ibid*, 28.

Sufism is the way of being God's "friend." In the general sense, everyone is God's friend. Those who perform their prescribed religious duties and refrain from major sins are God's friends. But when we say "friend" in a particular way, it takes on its own definition. To become candidates for that definition, our heart must be enlivened and our spirit polished. Just as we use our feet for travelling, we also must use our heart and spirit. This is possible by traveling on the "emerald hills of the heart" guided by innermost, more refined faculties.<sup>477</sup>

This statement clearly shows the primary concern of *The Emerald Hills of the Heart*, that is, 'how to climb up the emerald hills of the heart, on which God's relationship with the believer occurs.'<sup>478</sup>

The typical style of *The Emerald Hills of the Heart* marks two important factors of Gülen's approach to Sufism. First, Gülen's analysis of Sufi terms in light of the Qur'an and Hadith is entirely exclusive. He further conceptualizes Sufi terms in the well-trodden line of the Sunni Sufis, all of whom have established the compatibility of Sufism with the Shari'a. It is also noteworthy that, as Mustafa Gokcek points out, the majority of these scholars belong to a period prior to the emergence of tariqas.<sup>479</sup> The early Sufi authorities such as Qushayri, Muhasibi, Tusi, Kalabadhi, Abu Talip Makki, Hujwiri, Gazali and Ibn'ul Qayyim al-Jawziyyah led a mystical and ascetic life, sowing the seeds for Sufism to become a separate discipline with its own rules, methodology and terminology, but without institutionalizing their individual thoughts in the form of orders. Furthermore, as Mustafa Kara classifies, while the early pre-tariqa Sufis established basic concepts like *tawba* (repentance), *sabr* (patience) and *taqwa* (piety) from the sources of the Qur'an and

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<sup>477</sup> Eyup Can, Zaman daily, August, 1995; and Ünal and Williams, *Advocate of Dialogue*, 359-360.

<sup>478</sup> Gülen, *The Emerald Hills of the Heart 1*, 18.

<sup>479</sup> Mustafa Gokcek, "Fethullah Gülen and Sufism: A Historical Perspective," in *Muslim Citizens of the Globalized World: Contributions of the Gülen Movement*, eds. Robert Hunt and Yuksel Aslandogan (NJ: The Light, 2006), 159.

Hadith, later post-tariqa Sufis tended to signify the terminology related to the master-disciple relationship such as *rabita* and *silsila*.<sup>480</sup> Gülen's examination of Sufi terminology redeems the former, digging further beyond the period of tariqas.

Second, in retrieving Sufi concepts from the perspective of the Qur'an, Hadith and the Sufi thinkers, Gülen reactivates the existing concepts within contemporary conditions. *The Emerald Hills of the Heart* exemplifies Gülen's self-selection of Sufi concepts in order to revive and contemporize Sufism to be in tune with new contexts that differs markedly from the contexts of past Sufis. Indeed, what Gülen is actually doing is promoting key Sufi terms in a language that corresponds to the special characters of their contemporary status. As readily observable, this is why almost all of his articles on Sufi terms, explicitly or implicitly, contain a message to contemporary Muslims that describes how the concept should be understood and practiced in today's daily life. In other words, Gülen sets forth a highly practical Sufism by reassessing and refreshing Sufi terminology in a meaningful way to Muslims who live in the crisis of faith and spirituality. In his article of the heart, for instance, Gülen warns against the hardness of the heart from innumerable adversaries like unbelief, arrogance, worldly ambition, greed, excessive lust, selfishness and attachment to status.<sup>481</sup> Having noted this point, he emphasizes the necessity of Sufi trainings such as self-reflection, self-control and self-criticism. In Gülen's schema, however, this Sufi practice should not be confined within the sphere of

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<sup>480</sup> Mustafa Kara, "Books about Sufi Terminology," in *Sufism And Sufis in Ottoman Society. Sources, Doctrine, Rituals, Turuq, Architecture, Literature, Iconography, Modernism*, ed. Ahmet Yaşar Ocak (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 2005, 51-64.

<sup>481</sup> Gülen, *The Emerald Hills of the Heart 1*, 25.

the individual but must be extended to one's social relationships.<sup>482</sup> In his "Introduction" to the third volume of *the Emerald Hills of the Heart*, Enes Ergene, one of Gülen's foremost students, underlines this social aspect on the basis of his close observation of Gülen. According to Ergene, *The Emerald Hills of the Heart* was not written in accordance with any advance project that Gülen had in mind; rather, it came out gradually as a result of a necessity that he felt in the social condition.<sup>483</sup> Ergene further recalls that Gülen indicated his intention to prepare *The Emerald Hills of the Heart* with a concerned expression for social content and conditions. As this social outcome, in Ergene's view, *The Emerald Hills of the Heart* befits the barren period of Islamic spirituality.

Concerning the feature of *The Emerald Hills of the Heart* as a study of Sufi terminology, it also deserves to note why Gülen chose to write specifically on terminology rather than on his mystical experience or on historical and philosophical evaluation of Sufism. An appropriate answer could be found in relation to the ambiguity of the definition of Sufism. As remarked in the previous chapter, there have been ongoing debates and controversies surrounding the definition and the categories of Sufism as a result of the tension between the western orientalist/Muslim fundamentalist criticisms against Sufism and the original Sufi sources' appreciation of Sufism. These controversies have significantly effected a natural evolution of Sufi terminology, resulting in its vagueness and ambiguity of the definition of Sufism. In this context, Sufi terminology

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<sup>482</sup> See, for instance, *ibid*, 16-19.

<sup>483</sup> Enes Ergene, "Introduction" to Gülen's *Kalbin Zümriit Tepeleri 3* (Istanbul: Nil Yayinlari, 2003).



has come to possess obscure connotations to such an extent that its many concepts have lost their original meanings in light of the original sources. It goes without saying that the obscure terminology opens up the possibility of misinterpretation. In the contemporary context, this problematic nature of Sufi terms is further deepened under western-centric globalization, the preponderance of materialism over spirituality, and the secularization of religious language. As an inclusive reading of Gülen's works reveals, it is against this backdrop that he elaborates *The Emerald Hills of the Heart*. Thus, with its refreshing contextual reproduction of Sufi terms, *The Emerald Hills of the Heart* makes its distinctive contribution to clarifying Sufi terminology.

All of these traits of *The Emerald Hills of the Heart* clarify its place in the existing literature on Sufi terminology. In its approach to the terminology, this study parallels primary classic works. Like Kalabadhi's (d. 990) *al-Ta'arruf* and Qushayri's (d. 1072) *Risala*, it explains obscure Sufi texts and terms in an accessible and understandable language. Its description of Sufi terms on the basis of the Qur'an and Hadith also mirrors many classics, for instance, *Mashrab al-Arwah* of Ruzbihan Baqli (d. 1209), which examines 1001 terms by connecting each of them to relevant verses of the Qur'an and Hadith. Although *The Emerald Hills of the Heart* is not an innovative study, it has still its own marks. Needless to say, as a contemporary work, it deconstructs the classic terminology in tune with contemporary conditions. More strikingly, its explicit expression of the practical dimension of Sufism accentuates the social manifestation of personal Sufism that presupposes leaping over the confinement of tariqas. In this sense, Gülen's study is unique not only among the classics but also among contemporary works on Sufi terminology. A good number of modern scholars like Louis Massignon

considered the study of technical Sufi vocabulary as a requisite overture for a correct understanding of Sufi doctrines.<sup>484</sup> It followed many studies on Sufi terminology in different languages including Arabic, Persian, Turkish and English. And, most of them analyze Sufi terminology from the point of view of the contemporary sciences.<sup>485</sup> Although Gülen's study displays his comprehensive knowledge of the sciences, it is certainly distanced and differentiated from those academic works. In essence, it is a subjective study; each of its Sufi terms is explained from his reflective experiences in Sufism.

As a subjective work, the place of *The Emerald Hills of the Heart* in Gülen's other works is remarkable, as it explicates his Sufi tendencies. The primary concepts of Sufism that the study examines are also key terms for his other works. Sufi terminology in this study facilitates the correct understanding of his other works and thought, in which Sufi elements are indispensably involved. For instance, his core concepts of *hizmet* and Golden generation, which are, as noted earlier, intrinsically related to such Sufi terms as asceticism, love, piety and self-supervision, inevitably refer one to relevant terms in *The Emerald Hills of the Heart*. Perhaps, in this sense, one can read Gülen's words, "I first explain concepts, and then with the concepts, I will converse," which was stated prior to his writing of *The Emerald Hills of the Heart*.<sup>486</sup> *The Emerald Hills of the Heart* is not only a key to his other works, but also provides the main terminology of his Sufi-related

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<sup>484</sup> For instance, Louis Massignon, in his examination of the technical vocabulary of the Sufis especially Hallaj, insists that "one cannot with impunity underrate the part played by the technical vocabulary in the development of dogma in Islam"; cited from Arberry, A. *An Introduction to the History of Sufism*, 47.

<sup>485</sup> For a brief note on these studies, see, Mustafa Kara, "Books about Sufi Terminology," 63-64.

<sup>486</sup> Enes Ergene, "Introduction."

life and experiences. As a written expression of Gülen's reflective consideration of Sufi terminology, it mirrors his ascetic and pious life and mystical experiences. The study in turn illustrates the deep involvement of Sufism in his thought. Indeed, the many long years (eighteen years so far) that Gülen has spent on this study demonstrates Sufism as a powerful layer of his spiritual life and intellectual framework.

#### 4. 2. Gülen's Sufism

Gülen's works including *The Emerald Hills of the Heart* make salient two dimensions of his approach to Sufism. While one foot remains in the Sufi tradition, the other turns toward and round the contemporary world, generating its own unique sphere. Thus, it is distinctive not only in terms of a contemporary recast of the Sufi tradition, but also in the sense that even its foot in the tradition itself does not step on all the tradition in *toto*; rather, it is a dynamic outcome of Gülen's self-selection of specific Sufi forms, which enables the other foot to step forward to the contemporary contexts. It is no wonder, then, that Gülen's idea of Sufism is marked by its own specific features so as to be called 'Gülen's Sufism.'

The distinctive features of Gülen's Sufism are directly reflected and represented by its core characteristics, which this section will focus on. As the above discussion of his life and works sketches, Gülen's approach to Sufism has a number of components, most notably his emphasis on Sufism as the spiritual aspect of Islam - underlying individual purification by self-reflection of God beyond the limitation of tariqa, his transformation and mobilization of personal ascetic piety into society, and his advocacy of humanitarian

Sufism and practice of dialogue. This working description of Gülen's Sufism is well preserved in the opening word of this chapter. Following his own summary of some Sufi authorities' definition, Gülen defines Sufism in such a way as to stipulate his own perception. As the definition illuminates, Gülen's Sufism has four essential components, which make it possible to examine them separately but inclusively: 'Islamic spirituality,' 'Sufism without Tariqa,' 'Socially Engaged Sufism' and 'Dialogic Sufism.' For the order, I basically followed Gülen's insightful phrase, "after belief and knowledge comes love."<sup>487</sup>

### *Islamic Spirituality*

The theological foundation that builds up Gülen's Sufism is Islam. He begins *Emerald Hills of the Heart* with an assertion that "it [Sufism] does not contradict any of the Islamic ways based on the Qur'an and the Sunna. In fact, as is the case with other religious sciences, its source is the Qur'an and the Sunna."<sup>488</sup> To him, the knowledge based on spiritual discovery and inspiration "is and must be based on the Qur'an and the Sunna." Any knowledge that is not filtered through these two sources is not reliable. Taking the Qur'an and the Sunna as the sole criteria of knowledge and practice associated Sufism, Gülen examines Sufi terms and concepts, and in doing so, determines his approach to Sufism.

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<sup>487</sup> Gülen, "The Culture of the Heart," in en.fgulen.com.

<sup>488</sup> Gülen, *Emerald Hills of the Heart 1*, xxi.

In detail, Gülen emphasizes that the Qur'an is the core source to be reflected on, studied, and followed in all ways to become a perfect, universal human being.<sup>489</sup> If one does not adhere consciously and continually to the practices and concepts outlined in the Qur'an, one cannot be pious (*muttaqi*).<sup>490</sup> The central concept of the Qur'an is *tawhid*, as in Gülen's Sufism. He counts *tawhid* as the first principle of Sufism, which is, "reaching true belief in God's Divine Oneness and living in accordance with its demands."<sup>491</sup> In a notable instance, Gülen sees that annihilation in God (*fana fi'llah*) and subsistence by God's Self-Subsistence (*baqa bi'llah*) in the language of Sufism is a way to His Divine Oneness. To Sufis, annihilation means that they see none save God and set their hearts on Him alone. Seeing none save God means that "everything other than He is a shadow of the True Existence and Knowledge, having no essential value inherent to itself."<sup>492</sup> By abandoning all shadowy existence, thus, Sufis "take shelter in the protection and ownership of the True Existent One, and gain a new existence by Him."<sup>493</sup> Those who have reached this new existence can only utter "There is no really existent one save God." For Gülen, this is the ultimate state of annihilation in God, in which the colors of subsistence with God appear to the Sufis, leading them from one dimension of "there is

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<sup>489</sup> Ibid, 11.

<sup>490</sup> Ibid, 45.

<sup>491</sup> Ibid, xv.

<sup>492</sup> Gülen, *The Emerald Hills of the Heart* 2, 145.

<sup>493</sup> Ibid. 153.

no deity” to a new dimension of “but God.”<sup>494</sup> In this line, Gülen insists that “Sufism has considered unity with respect to both its beginning and end.”<sup>495</sup>

It is dangerous to be lost, however, in annihilation without guidance in the endless ocean of Divine Knowledge and Existence. For Gülen, the prophetic way is *the* guidance that should be strictly followed in realizing *tawhid* especially as an expression of the spiritual state and pleasures. He warns, “even the lights brightest in appearance, and the deepest pleasures and any knowledge of God not found within the Prophet’s guidance are no more than carnal pleasures and ostentation.”<sup>496</sup> Likewise, in Gülen’s Sufism, together with the Qur’an, the Sunna is both the guidance and the criterion for all spiritual journeys. He considers the Qur’an to be identical with the Prophet Muhammad, who is the embodiment of the Qur’an in words, belief and conduct.<sup>497</sup> Gülen regards the Prophet as the perfect ideal for Sufis, and calls him by various Sufi-related names such as “the highest degree of human perfection,” “the foremost in reflection and all other virtues,” “the greatest hero of state,” “the truest ascetic in all respects,” “the perfect guide of humanity” and “a Sufi master of spiritual profundity.” Underlying these central images of the Prophet in Sufism, he asserts that “the basic core of this science [Sufism] has always been the essence of the Muhammadan Truth.”<sup>498</sup>

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<sup>494</sup> Ibid, 154.

<sup>495</sup> Ibid, 210.

<sup>496</sup> Ibid. 221.

<sup>497</sup> Gülen, *Essentials of the Islamic Faith*, trans. Ali Unal (Fairfax, VA: The Fountain, 2000), 262.

<sup>498</sup> Gülen, *The Emerald Hills of the Heart 1*, xviii. See, also, Gülen, *Fikir Atlası (Fasildan Fasıla 5)* (Izmir: Nil, 2006): 58-61.

By the same token, Gülen does not separate Sufism from the Shari'a. To him, Sufism is based on observing even the most 'trivial' rules of the Shari'a in order to penetrate their inner meaning.<sup>499</sup> Sufism is not incompatible with Islamic jurisprudence. In Gülen's view, Sufism and jurisprudence are the two dimensions of the Shari'a in the sense that one cannot survive without the other. While jurisprudence regulates all aspects of daily life, teaching one how to pray and be ritually pure, fast, and charitable, Sufism focuses on what these and other actions really mean and how to elevate each individual to the rank of a universal, perfect, and true human being (*al-insan al-kamil*).<sup>500</sup> Thus, a Sufi never separates his/her path from the observance of the Shari'a, and by observing all its requirements, travels toward the goal in utmost humility and submission.<sup>501</sup> Specifically, Gülen centers the Shari'a on the Sufi path, which proceeds with three consecutive stages: "theoretical Shari'a," "practical Shari'a" and "Shari'a experienced in truth."<sup>502</sup> In connection, he stresses knowledge and strict observance of all religious obligations as a prerequisite to all Sufi practices. For instance, perfect piety, which can be obtained by avoiding doubtful things and minor sins, requires one to know what is lawful and what is forbidden (*haram* and *halal*). In the same sense, asceticism (*zuhd*), which begins with the intention to avoid what has been forbidden and to engage only in what has been allowed, can be deepened by being extremely careful even when engaging in what is allowed.<sup>503</sup>

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<sup>499</sup> Ibid, xiv.

<sup>500</sup> Ibid, xix-xx.

<sup>501</sup> Ibid, xiv.

<sup>502</sup> Gülen, *The Emerald Hills of the Heart* 2, 267.

<sup>503</sup> Gülen, *Emerald Hills of the Heart* 1, 42.

Having conceptualized Sufism within the framework of Islam, Gülen harshly rejects the claim of foreign-originated and/or non-Islamic Sufism as upheld by oriental scholarship and Islamic fundamentalists. In a direct and decisive tone, he insists that Sufism has nothing to do with Western or Eastern mysticism, yoga, or philosophy. In his evaluation, the claim that the term *sufi* originated from the Greek word “sophia” or “sophos” is nothing but “a fabrication of foreign researchers who try to prove that Sufism has a foreign and therefore non-Islamic origin.”<sup>504</sup> Early Sufis, according to Gülen, were by no means followers of ancient philosophers, Christian mystics, or Hindu holy men; instead, they were spiritual people seeking to follow the footsteps of the Prophet and his Companions by imitating their lifestyles.<sup>505</sup> Most obviously, for Gülen, Sufism is a very Islamic way of life to reach the Infinite One (Allah), which consequently and essentially is different from foreign mystical ways that do not observe any Islamic rules.

Whilst Gülen rejects the foreign origin thesis, he strongly holds that Sufism represents the heart of Islam. He does not only see Sufism within the broader frame of the Shari’a, but further considers it to be the inner dimension of the Shari’a. To Gülen, the harmony and balance between the inner and outer dimension of the Shari’a is imperative for a Muslim to humbly submit (*islam*) his/her life fully to God. Over-emphasis on one side may well result in risking one’s right religiosity. For instance, the outer practice of Islam without attention to its inner meanings results in dry scriptualism, while concentration only on the interior disciplines by rejecting prescribed rituals and behaviors reduces and obstructs one’s spiritual development. From this consideration, Gülen puts

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<sup>504</sup> Ibid, xxiv.

<sup>505</sup> Ibid, xxiii.



an emphasis on Sufism as “the spirit of the Shari’a, which is made up of austerity, self-control and criticism, and the continuous struggle to resist the temptations of Satan and the carnal, evil-commanding self in order to fulfill religious obligations.”<sup>506</sup>

It is this spiritual aspect of Sufism that Gülen gives weight to. Promoting a broader conception of spirituality, Gülen defines Islam as a religion of the spiritual realm. However, Gülen specifies Islamic spirituality that was illuminated by the Prophet and later systemized under the name of tasawwuf, which takes the training of the ego as a basic principle. In this sense, as several scholars derive, Gülen’s concept of Islamic spirituality is Sufism, which particularly makes toleration and dialog key values for his thought.<sup>507</sup> Theologically, Sufism, Islamic spirituality, “leads people to perfection or enables them to reacquire their primordial angelic state,” preventing them from heedlessly falling into the lowest levels from the best pattern (*ahsani taqwim*) that God created humanity on to preserve His Divine Names and Attributes.<sup>508</sup> Practically, to Gülen, Sufism puts this theology at work through its primary function of interiorizing Islamic faith and practices in a fully meaningful way. He gives special priority to this spiritual function of Sufism with his distinctive usage of term “spiritual intellect.”

Sufis emphasize self-purification, deepening the meaning of good deeds and multiplying them, and attaining higher standards of good morals so that one’s conscience can awaken to the knowledge of God and thus embark upon a path leading to the required sincerity in

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<sup>506</sup> Ibid, xviii.

<sup>507</sup> As the representative studies, see, Thomas Michel, “Turkish Islam in Dialogue with Modern Society: the Neo-Sufi Spirituality of the Gülen Movement,” in *Islam and Enlightenment: New Issues*, ed. Erik Borgman and Pim Valkenberg (London: SCM Press, 2005), 71-80, and David B Capes, “Tolerance in the Theology and Thought of A. J. Conyers and Fethullah Gülen,” paper presented at the conference, *Muslim World in Transition: Contributions of the Gülen Movement* (University of London, 2007). Available online at en.fgulen.com.

<sup>508</sup> Gülen, *Prophet Muhammad: The Infinite Light 2*, 153-154.

living Islam and obtaining God's pleasure. By means of these virtues, men and women can acquire another nature, "another heart" (*a spiritual intellect* within the heart), a deeper knowledge of God, and another "tongue" with which to mention God. All of these will help them to observe the Shari'a commandments based on a deeper awareness of, and with a disposition for, devotion to God.<sup>509</sup>

By "spiritual intellect," Gülen means one of man's three essential faculties, along with reason and will. In man's natural and continual inner struggle to choose between good and evil, right and wrong, the spiritual intellect guides reason, which "can be swayed by carnal appetites, personal desires, biases and interests, and by such emotions as anger and rancour."<sup>510</sup> In other words, the spiritual intellect is the source of moral values and virtues, which provides, beyond the discursive reasoning, intuitional knowledge about the eternal truth about God (*tawhid*) and the inner essences of the created. According to Gülen, in Sufism, it is by this action of the spiritual intellect that as the Qur'anic verse 'flee to God' (51:50) refers to, one flees (*firar*) from the 'shadow' to the 'original' and from the piece of glass (in which the Sun is reflected) to the 'Sun' itself.<sup>511</sup>

Thus, to Gülen, Sufism as Islamic spirituality and just as Islam itself is ahistorical. In essence, it has no history, since it is the invisible, animating Islamic life. In this sense, Gülen reiteratively describes Sufism as "the Muhammadan Truth's pure spiritual dimension," "the essence of humanity's being," "the real nature of existence," "the inner dynamics of humanity and the cosmos," and "the reality of that which lies beneath and beyond their outer dimension." On a second level, however, Sufism manifests itself

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<sup>509</sup> Gülen, *The Emerald Hills of the Heart 1*, xxii. Italic is my emphasis.

<sup>510</sup> "Fethullah Gülen: His Remarkable Achievement," *The Fountain* Issue 23 (July – September, 1998).

<sup>511</sup> Gülen, *The Emerald Hills of the Heart 1*, 13.

historically and tangibly, as it was most deeply practiced as a lifestyle by the Prophet and the Four Caliphs and later imitated by Sufis. Gülen traces back the early history of Sufism, stating that “at this point in time [the second Islamic century], Sufism was characterized by spiritual people seeking to follow the footsteps of our Prophet, upon him be peace and blessings, and his Companions by imitating their life-styles. This is why Sufism has always been known and remembered as the spiritual dimension of the Islamic way of life.”<sup>512</sup> Thanks to them, Gülen goes on to describe, “the Islamic spiritual life based on asceticism, regular worship, abstention from all major and minor sins, sincerity and purity of intention, love and yearning, and the individual’s admission of his or her essential impotence and destitution became the subject matter of Sufism.”<sup>513</sup> On this subject matter and following methods dating back to the time of the Prophet and his Companions, the early Sufis also “compiled books on austerity and spiritual struggle against carnal desires and temptations, as well as states and stations of the spirit.”<sup>514</sup> Such literature aimed to draw the attention of people to the observance of the outer dimension of religion, directing it to the inner dimension of religious life.

The contemporary world, Gülen laments, has lost this spirituality. Locally, the Turkish Republic removed Sufism from its education curriculum and so Islam’s spiritual life as well,<sup>515</sup> and globally, “many are led away from spirituality by the influence of

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<sup>512</sup> Gülen, *The Emerald Hills of the Heart 1*, xxiv.

<sup>513</sup> Ibid, xviii.

<sup>514</sup> Ibid, xix.

<sup>515</sup> See, Gülen, *Toward a Global Civilization of Love and Tolerance*, 255.

positivism and thus deprived of the fruits of Sufism.”<sup>516</sup> It is against this condition that Gülen sees it very necessary to revitalize Islamic spirituality, that is, Sufism, in order to comprehend existence completely in combination with scientific research. In particular, from the perspective of the underlined ahistorical nature of Sufism and its early exemplified historical manifestations, Gülen reconstructs many Sufi principles and spiritual exercises for contemporary needs. The most remarkable one is “Sufism without Tariqa.”

### *Sufism without Sufi orders*

In Gülen’s thought, Sufism as Islamic spirituality differentiates and distinguishes itself from Sufi orders. Above all, Sufism is the ahistorical essence of Islam, while tariqa is nothing more than one of its diverse historical manifestations. Clearer than any other passage, Gülen underlines this point in his answer to the question of whether it is necessary to represent Sufism with Sufi orders:

As I tried to present in above, Sufism is a name, which was later given to the life and the science of religious and spiritual essence of Islam It is not necessary to use this name. What is important is to live with the actions of the heart like asceticism (zuhd), piety (taqwa), perfect goodness (ihsan) and knowledge of God (marifah), as it is an inseparable part of Islam. As for Sufi orders, they came out five centuries after the Prophet as an institutionalized form of such spiritual aspect of Islam. I have respect for the orders due to their goals and positive functions that were generally shown in our history. However, it can be debatable if today is the appropriate period for the orders, or whether it should be or not. Still, no Muslim can be indifferent and impassive to Sufism, Islamic spiritual aspect, which constitutes the essence of religion, fosters its belief and leads one to being a perfect human being.<sup>517</sup>

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<sup>516</sup> Cited from Sarıtoprak, “Fethullah Gülen: A Sufi in His Own Way,” 165.

<sup>517</sup> Nicole Pope, “Interview with Gülen,” *Fransız Le Monde Gazetesi*, 28 April 1998.

As clear as it is, to Gülen, Sufism is not something to be represented by the later institutionalized Sufi orders; in essence, it is far beyond the domain of the orders. Remarkably, in this assertion that underlines the inseparable place of Sufism in Islamic life, he doubts the necessity of Sufi orders in the present day. At the core of this questioning lies Gülen's revitalization of Said Nursi's assertion that "our time is not a time for tariqas (Sufi orders), but for *haqiqa* (the truth)."<sup>518</sup> On the basis of this phrase, Gülen puts his own approach to Sufism in tune with the contemporary context, which is not identical to that of Nursi. As will be detailed throughout the remainder of this chapter, significantly, Gülen advances the phrase by combining it with the other characteristics of his Sufism, which altogether determine the nature and the direction of his movement. As such a recast, the phrase reappears in Gülen's thought as an understanding of Sufism not in the ways represented by Sufi orders, but originally, in the way of the Prophet and his Companions. Put simply, this approach can be well characterized as 'Islamic Sufism beyond institutionalized Sufi orders.' In other words, it is the way of 'Sufism (tasawwuf) without Sufi orders (tariqa),' which places itself at the core of Gülen's Sufism that directs itself to the reality or the truth of Islam (*haqiqa*).

'Sufism without Sufi orders' must not be understood as Gülen's total rejection of the orders. In fact, following the above quotation, Gülen appreciates the Sufi orders as the ports from which Sufis set out by learning the principles of the journey leading to God. Specifically, he insists that it must be acknowledged that the orders in Ottoman Turkey, with their integrating and uniting functions, had positive influences on the individual

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<sup>518</sup> Hakan Yavuz, "Fethullah Gülen'le Röportaj" [interview with Fethullah Gülen], *Milliyet*, 12 August 1997.

spiritual training of self and the socio-economic life.<sup>519</sup> Along with this recognition, however, Gülen does not hesitate to underline negative aspects and impacts of the orders. First of all, he points out the pitfall of the role of the master as a spiritual mediator between the disciple and God. Theologically, humans can make mistakes, which should be corrected; thus, Sufi masters, even great Sufis, can happen to regard their spiritual pleasure of station and state in discord with the truth of the Qur'an. Danger here is not only on the masters but occurs especially when a disciple follows his/her master blindly, and this blind imitation is bound to end in his/her spiritual death as shown representatively in the claim of being the Mahdi or the Messiah.<sup>520</sup> A more generally observable danger is that Sufis in the orders may go too far "to prefer sainthood to Prophethood and, favoring the principles and manners established by the founder of their orders over those of the Prophetic way."<sup>521</sup> Consequently, the orders have the possibility of opening to a way deviant from the Prophetic way and the rules of the Shari'a. Moreover, these orders are "are almost beyond number."<sup>522</sup> While this innumerability can play a positive role in person-to-person guidance, it also plays a divisional function in society. Thus, Gülen criticizes:

[I]f they [Sufis] regard criticizing and quarrelling with others, rumor mongering and slander, and cherishing ill-opinions about others as religious services, then they are gravely mistaken; the places they attend are only places of hypocrisy and their guides are not Sufis, but rather bigoted highwaymen. Who knows that such attitudes did not cause

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<sup>519</sup> Ibid.

<sup>520</sup> See, Gülen, *The Emerald Hills of the Heart 2*, 146-147.

<sup>521</sup> Ibid, 242-243.

<sup>522</sup> Gülen, *The Emerald Hills of the Heart 1*, 154.

Destiny to allow the banning of such and the closing of the ways that led to their collapse?”<sup>523</sup>

As a historical example, Gülen reads the loss of the original functions of the orders as a contributor to the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. Since they continued the divisionary and sectarian attitudes, in Gülen’s view, the Kemalist Republic rightly abolished them in order to protect society from degeneration and corruption. He further expresses concern that the same thing can happen today as in the past.<sup>524</sup>

Having given these aspects of Sufi orders, Gülen is very convinced that “our time is not a time for Sufi orders,” and instead, proposes that we need “but for *haqiqa* (the truth).” In any case, to him, due to their identity as no more than a historical institution, the orders are not a necessary diversion either for society or for Islamic spiritual inner life. On the contrary, Gülen insists, it is *haqiqa* that our time needs. In Sufism, *Haqiqa*, which literally denotes ‘Reality’ or ‘Truth’ and is also generally known as annihilation in God (*fana*), has been technically utilized in many Sufis as the inner dimension with regard to the Shari’a. Similarly, in Gülen’s Sufism, *haqiqa* is used for ‘the Truth of Islam.’ Specifically, however, he resists the intermediary role of the Sufi orders that is typically located in the relationship of the Shari’a, Tariqa and *Haqiqa* (and/or Marifa). Affirming the inseparability of *haqiqa* from the Shari’a, Gülen upholds that it is the Shari’a that paves the direct way to reach *haqiqa*. That is, without entering tariqa, the unnecessary medium, it is possible and even necessary to directly reach *haqiqa* through the Shari’a, which is very enshrined in the Qur’an and the Sunna. The Qur’an itself, not shaykhs in

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<sup>523</sup> Gülen, *The Emerald Hills of the Heart* 2, 243.

<sup>524</sup> See, Nicole Pope, “Interview with Gülen.”

the orders, should be the sole guide (*murshid*) for one's spiritual journey toward *haqiqa* and is indeed the most perfect guide. This is the sublime path that the Prophet lived in and exemplified. His Companions further characterized this Muhammadan Truth. In this line, Gülen states that "as a lifestyle, Sufism was practiced at the most sublime level during the Age of Happiness, the Time of the Prophet and the Four Caliphs."<sup>525</sup> Thus, "Islam's spiritual life should be considered from the approach of the Prophet's Companions."<sup>526</sup> In Gülen's reading, this is no less than what Imam Rabbani and Said Nursi tried to revive. In the same sense, Gülen's concept of "öze dönüş" (return to the origin) indicates the return to the Qur'an, uninterrupted by any intermediaries, to reach *haqiqa*.

To Gülen, Sufism is a lifestyle to ensure spiritual growth toward Islamic Truth (*Haqiqa*). It is an embedded reality of Islamic life through the processes of individualization and culturalization. Notwithstanding its being of Islamic spirituality, this reality alone cannot be moribund and/or dying out. This is why, in Gülen's view, the Kemalist attack and its ban of the Sufi orders and tekkes could not affect Sufism. From this perspective, Gülen most strongly rejects any attempts to equate Sufi orders with Sufism, underlining that Sufi orders are not necessary for Sufism, which lets one to arrange his/her life for the pleasure of God, to live in that direction, to worship as if he/she sees God, and finally to do best to be morally a perfect human being.

All of these considerations on 'Sufism without Sufi orders' penetrate through Gülen's Sufism. In particular, Gülen integrates them into his "Another Way of

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<sup>525</sup> Gülen, *Toward a Global Civilization of Love and Tolerance*, 166.

<sup>526</sup> Ünal and Williams, *Advocate of Dialogue*, 359-360.



Journeying and Initiation,” one of the concluding chapters of *Emerald Hills of the Heart*

2. Assuming that “there is one [way] which is based on the way of the Prophet’s Companions,”<sup>527</sup> he finds this way in Said Nursi’s four core concepts: impotence, poverty, compassion, and reflection. Gülen reformulates this way with six concepts, impotence, poverty, compassion, reflection, ardor, and thanks, and presents its synthesized essence as:

I am helpless, You are the All-Powerful; I am poor, You are the All-Wealthy; I am needy and in straitened circumstances, You are the All-Compassionate; I am bewildered and seeking a way out, You are the only Goal Which is sought and to be reached.” It is not possible for those who are aware of their helplessness, poverty, neediness and bewilderment to see themselves as pure or of being of any rank, thus it is not possible for them to be heedless or forgetful of God while knowing that whoever forgets Him is forgotten and bound to forget him or herself also. Nor is it possible for them to attribute to themselves the accomplishments with which God has favored them, using the pretext of their endeavors, nor to ascribe their evil and sins to Destiny, thus regarding themselves as existing independently of God.<sup>528</sup>

For Gülen, this way is more direct and safer even than the way focusing on love, suffering, and similar essentials by which one can reach God. By being perfectly conscious of one’s essential poverty before God, one feels absolute dependence on Him and as such becomes absolutely rich, for such a person no longer feels any need. For one who has attained this degree of richness, “it is as if he or she has found a credit card that is valid everywhere.”<sup>529</sup> This perfect feeling of poverty is the goal of saints, the natural state of purified scholars, and the most manifest sign of love of God.<sup>530</sup>

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<sup>527</sup> Gülen, *The Emerald Hills of the Heart* 2,276.

<sup>528</sup> Ibid, 277.

<sup>529</sup> Gülen, *The Emerald Hills of the Heart* 1, 172.

<sup>530</sup> Ibid, 171.

Gülen does by no means perceive this way of absolute poverty within the domain of tariqas. This is neither a way of tariqa nor shares with tariqa in characterizing aspects. Above all, Gülen conceptualizes it as the way of the Prophet and his Companions, which exemplifies ‘Sufism without Sufi orders.’ Accordingly, this way does not maintain the master-disciple relationship, a common characteristic of the Sufi orders, as it takes the Qur’an and the Prophet as the sole and the most perfect guides for humanity toward the Almighty.<sup>531</sup> In situations where these guides have been neglected, and accordingly many Sufis have either deviated or been left stranded halfway,<sup>532</sup> it is necessary and essential to take guidance from the Qur’an and the Sunna to reach God. On this basis, Gülen asserts that “Sufism is the path to make one’s conscience hear and feel Islamic truth (haqiqa)”.<sup>533</sup> He redefines that “Sufism, after all, is another principle that leads a human being to be nonexistent by comprehending his/her impotence, poverty and nothingness, and by dissolving him/herself before the attributes of the existence of the Truth that forms the essence of the created.”<sup>534</sup>

Obviously, Gülen’s idea of ‘Sufism without Sufi orders’ is not an innovative concept. It not only relies on Nursi’s original way, but also reflects the saying that ‘Sufism was a reality without a name.’ As representative examples, Abu al-Hasan Bushanji described Sufism as that Sufism today is a name without a reality that was once

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<sup>531</sup> See, Gülen, *The Emerald Hills of the Heart 2*, 238-239.

<sup>532</sup> Ibid, 257.

<sup>533</sup> Sızıntı, vol. 9 (June 1987), 101; cited from tr.fgulen.com

<sup>534</sup> Ibid.

a reality without a name.<sup>535</sup> al-Hujwiri also lamented that “today Sufism is a name without a reality, but formerly it was a reality without a name.”<sup>536</sup> He pointed out that while the Prophet’s generation practiced Sufism without any given name, nowadays its action is known but not its practice. In addition, Ibn Khaldun, who himself was not a Sufi but a renowned historian, is said to have reported that “at the time of the Prophet it was not necessary to give a particular name to Islam’s interior path.”<sup>537</sup> These sayings in conjunction illustrate the ahistorical and essential nature of Sufism, which exists as a reality but eludes form. In other words, Sufism, as the inner spirituality of Islam, frees itself from external formulations. The outer forms can only be innumerable for describing certain features and manifestations of Sufism. As noted so far, Gülen’s concept of ‘Sufism without Sufi orders’ takes a similar line of ‘Sufism was a reality without a name.’

Nevertheless, ‘Sufism without Sufi orders’ in Gülen’s thought marks its own footprint. Above all, it does not only target for an individual spirituality but also necessitate its socialization. This is another significant aspect that ‘Sufism without Sufi orders’ connotes, as Gülen considers it as the way of the Prophet and his Companions who never secluded themselves from people. Without doubt, this social aspect does not mean the institutionalized forms of the Sufi orders, but is remarkably different from its

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<sup>535</sup> See, Valerie Hoffman, *Sufism, Mystics, and Saints in Modern Egypt*, (Columbia, University of South Carolina Press: 1995), 3.

<sup>536</sup> Hujwiri in *Kashf al-Mahjub*, cited from Eric Geoffroy, “Approaching Sufism,” in *Sufism: Love & Wisdom*, (eds.) Jean-Louis Michon and Roger Gaetani (Bloomington: The Perennial Philosophy Series, 2006), 49.

<sup>537</sup> Ibid.

institutionalized counterpart. This is socially engaged Sufism, which is intrinsically linked to ‘Sufism without Sufi orders’ in Gülen’s Sufism.

### *Socially Engaged Sufism*

To Gülen, Sufism as Islamic spirituality must not remain a way of personal inner purification, but should be reflected in society. Gülen is adamant about the transformation from the inner purification or interiorization of Islamic spirituality into its outer reflection or exteriorization to society. This is another grounding characteristic of Gülen’s Sufism, which underlines social religiosity or this-worldly mysticism as popularly used in English, and which reflects socially engaged Sufism in the Turkish Sufi tradition as discussed in Chapter 2. In sharp contrast to the passive personal pietism that has been a common image of Sufi orders, in Gülen’s idea of socially engaged Sufism, rather than ‘isolation from the world,’ active participation within and for society is an inseparable component of Sufism.

Just as the other characteristics of his Sufism, Gülen finds the root of socially engaged Sufism in the life of the Prophet, which is represented by the Prophet’s descending to people from his spiritual journey of ascending.<sup>538</sup> The Companions had also followed this path, representing Islamic daily life while among the people. For instance, in his explanation of the Sufi concept of “Suffering” (*Chila*), Gülen describes it as a necessary course of spiritual training that is common with Abrahamic religions.<sup>539</sup> In

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<sup>538</sup> Gülen, *The Emerald Hills of the Heart* 2, 207.

<sup>539</sup> *Ibid*, 232.

Sufism, *chila* denotes an initiate's spending at least forty days in strict austerity and self-discipline in retreat, during which he/she abandons all worldly pleasures and delights.<sup>540</sup>

Gülen interprets *chila* as the most direct way for Sufis to reach God through purifying their minds and hearts and deepening in thought and feelings in consideration of the world beyond. However, this seclusion and abandonment for suffering toward God must be in consideration of other people, as he states:

For those who succeed the Prophets, suffering is, rather than preoccupation with worship and the recitation of God's Names in seclusion, and the abandonment of an easy life for the sake of torment, the pursuit only of God's good pleasure and approval, always being aware of God's company even while among people, arousing in hearts zeal for worshipping God with sincere Islamic thoughts, feelings and attitudes, representing Islam in daily life in the best way possible, stirring up Islamic feelings in others, and by developing in others the desire to believe. This is the way of the Companions.<sup>541</sup>

Likewise, as the way of the Companions, the carriers of the Prophetic way, Gülen is convinced of Sufism within society. On the basis of their examples that play a pivotal role as 'polished mirrors' - one of the most frequently used terms in Gülen's thought, he further develops the concept of "journeying from God," which symbolizes the social nature of Sufism. To him, "journeying and initiation" (*sayr u suluk*) is a process of spiritual path, which goes on in order "journeying to God" (*sayr ilallah*), "journeying in God" (*sayr fillah*), "journeying with God" (*sayr maallah*), and "journeying from God" (*sayr anillah*).<sup>542</sup> By "journeying from God" in this process, Gülen necessitates the return of travelers to people in order to share their experiences and devote their lives to saving

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<sup>540</sup> Ibid, 230.

<sup>541</sup> Ibid, 235.

<sup>542</sup> Ibid, 244-262.

others from worldly and other-worldly dungeons.<sup>543</sup> Put simply, Sufi spiritual training by means of isolation from the world incumbently presupposes the return to the world.

Gülen's idea of socially engaged Sufism stimulates the collective well-being, beyond an individual salvation that many Sufis have aimed. Individuals, who once taste spiritual pleasure in their journey 'toward, in and with God,' come back 'from God' to value and perpetuate the experience or the attained spirituality through constant 'God-consciousness' in society. It is social spheres that make this process happen; the individuals set firmly up, deepen and enrich their 'God-consciousness' in daily life through doing service for others in a way reflecting their newly-acquired spiritual experiences. Throughout this process, personal and emotional experiences of Sufis are rationalized with self-disciplined life and work in this world and further instrumentalized for the collective good. In this sense, the collective goodness is realized through the sum of individual salvational efforts. As such, Gülen's socially engaged Sufism spins by two wheels, sobriety and action.

Sober aspect is ubiquitous in Gülen's writings. In particular, he puts a great emphasis on 'knowledge,' which makes spiritual experiences rationally meaningful and socially manifested. Noting the Sufi leaders who "give knowledge precedence over the spiritual state of the Sufis because that state depends on knowledge,"<sup>544</sup> he asserts that "any state which is not based on knowledge is tantamount to heresy," and straightforwardness through knowledge is imperative because it means rising to "a

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<sup>543</sup> Ibid, 247.

<sup>544</sup> Ibid, 22.

heavenly point on the wings of the state [*hal*] based on knowledge.”<sup>545</sup> Along with the aforementioned core concepts such as “intellect with heart” (*kalb ile kafa*) and “spiritual intellect,” Gülen’s conceptualization of wakefulness (*yaqzah*) clearly indicates his weight on knowledge. Reasoning from the Prophetic saying that “My eyes sleep but my heart does not,” he regards wakefulness as self-possessed awareness and action “as if seeing God and as if being in His company.”<sup>546</sup> Sufis should be in such a wakefulness constantly so as not to fall into any confusion in their spiritual journey. Such a wakefulness, by exposing and alerting one consciously in God’s sight, opens a way to reach ‘perfect goodness’ (*ihsan*).<sup>547</sup> In this sense, Gülen sees wakefulness, the self-possessed God-consciousness, as the first and foremost of the Sufi concepts, which “are viewed as the sites of the Muhammadan Truth in one’s heart,” and which give lights to the spiritual path leading to God.<sup>548</sup>

Gülen’s prioritization of knowledge in the Sufi path is intrinsically linked to his holding with *ijtihad*. To him, *ijtihad* is a major tool in understanding the dynamic nature of Islam, which renews itself in real life situations and changes from one context to another. Thus, time and conditions are essential means to interpret Islam. It is as such “the Qur’an is like a rose that every passing day develops a new petal and continues to blossom. In order to discover its depth and to obtain its jewels in its deeper veils or strata,

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<sup>545</sup> Ibid, 81.

<sup>546</sup> Ibid, 223-225.

<sup>547</sup> Ibid, 225.

<sup>548</sup> Gülen, *The Emerald Hills of the Heart 1*, xvi-xvii.

a new interpretation should be made at least every 25 years.”<sup>549</sup> In a more decisive way, Gülen confirms that “to freeze *ijtihad* means to freeze Islam and imprison it to a given time and space.”<sup>550</sup> His approach to Sufism follows this basic account of *ijtihad*. At the beginning of his examination of key concepts of Sufism, Gülen clarifies that the source of Sufism is “the Qur’an and the Sunna, as well as the conclusions drawn from the Qur’an and the Sunna via *ijtihad* (deduction) by the purified scholars of the early period of Islam.”<sup>551</sup> As such, *ijtihad* plays a determining role in the evolution of Gülen’s idea of Sufism, especially as a primary tool that puts Islamic spirituality into practice with respect to both the traditional account and contemporary context. In other words, *ijtihad* does not confine itself to his evaluation of Sufism and Sufi orders, but, more importantly, it takes its special place in characterizing Gülen’s own approach to Sufism.

From this perspective of knowledge and *ijtihad*, Gülen revisits and clarifies his position regarding ‘sober vs. intoxicated’ issue in Sufism. To him, while intoxication (*sukr*) refers to a state in which one is enraptured and losing oneself with pleasure, sobriety (*sahw*) denotes a station in which one returns from the intoxicated state and lives with knowledge and consciousness.<sup>552</sup> In terms of characteristics, the former has an unintended and sudden absence of feelings and consciousness, while the latter has a

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<sup>549</sup> Ünal and Williams, *Advocate of Dialogue*, 52.

<sup>550</sup> Cited from Ihsan Yilmaz, “Ijtihad and Tajdid by Conduct: the Gülen Movement,” in *Turkish Islam and the Secular State: The Gülen Movement*, eds. Hakan M. Yavuz, and John L. Esposito (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 2003), 209.

<sup>551</sup> Gülen, *The Emerald Hills of the Heart 1*, xxi.

<sup>552</sup> Gülen, *The Emerald Hills of the Heart 2*, 125.



feeling of peace and rest with knowledge, wakefulness and self-possession.<sup>553</sup> In this division, Gülen prefers sobriety to intoxication, concerning some possible but critical dangers in the state of intoxication, which may lead Sufis to deviate from the main destination and fail to reach God. It may well occur especially when Sufis “pursue hidden realities or truths, miracle-working, spiritual pleasure, and ecstasy” and “cherish such desires and expectations as spiritual rank, working miracles, and sainthood.”<sup>554</sup> By exclusively focusing on ecstasy and falling into its pleasure, these Sufis can be “so intoxicated with the wine coming from the source of everything that even the Trumpet of *Israfil* cannot cause them to recover from that stupor.”<sup>555</sup>

However, this stance on intoxication does not suggest Gülen’s nullification of it. Compared to the claim (like that of Muslim fundamentalists) that has disapproved even the use of the term intoxication by considering it as against both reason and the Shari’a, Gülen does not criticize Sufis in the intoxicated state. To him, intoxication is a metaphor used to express a spiritual state in which one can be overflowed with the rays and gifts of God, and which has also its basis in the Prophetic tradition.<sup>556</sup> In such an intoxicated and inevitable state that Sufis cannot control themselves in being overflowed in receiving a gift of God, they may utter such ‘theopathic locutions’ (*shathiyyat*) as “Glory be to me, how exalted my being is” (attributed to Bayazid al-Bistami), “I am the Truth” (attributed to al-Husayn b. Mansur al-Hallaj al-Mansur), or “The Lord is the servant, and the servant

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<sup>553</sup> Ibid, 126-127.

<sup>554</sup> Gülen, *The Emerald Hills of the Heart 1*, xxv.

<sup>555</sup> Ibid, 15.

<sup>556</sup> Gülen, *The Emerald Hills of the Heart 2*, 127-128.

is the Lord” (attributed to Muhy al-Din ibn al-Arabi).<sup>557</sup> Certainly, Gülen agrees that these utterances are incompatible with the rules of the Shari’a, considering them “nothing but a deviation from the true path.”<sup>558</sup> Nevertheless, to him, their words should not be accepted at face value but must be interpreted in accordance with the Qur’an and Sunna. Their words are excusable due to the inevitable states that they were in. However, Gülen warns that others, who willfully imitate them, will be held accountable.<sup>559</sup> In a similar line, Gülen interprets the doctrine of the Unity of Being (*Wahdat al-Wujud*) and the utterances related to it. Insofar as they result from a certain intoxicated state of spiritual journey, they are tolerable. However, if this idea and its related utterances result in shaping a philosophy like ‘the unity of existence,’ they are not acceptable; they may lead one, first, to get involved in a sort of dissipating and useless philosophical consideration and debate, and second, to fall into views that God takes on bodily forms (incarnation) or that there is a created being that is united with God and becomes God (union).<sup>560</sup> Therefore, the doctrine of the Unity of Being (*Wahdat al-Wujud*) is not a safe way, as it bears the possibility for the most abominable blasphemies associating partners with God or even denying God.<sup>561</sup>

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<sup>557</sup> Ibid, 146. For a comparative view between Gülen’s ideas of these Sufis and their thoughts, see, Michael. Sells, *Early Islamic Mysticism* (New York: Paulist Press, 1996): Chapter 7: Bistami: 212-250; Louis Massignon, *The passion of Al-Hallaj: Mystic and Martyr of Islam* 4 volumes, ed. and trans. Herbert Mason, Princeton, N.J.:Princeton University Press, 1982; and, Ibn Arabi, *The Meccan Revelations* Vol 1, 2, ed. Michel Chodkiewicz (New York: Pir Press, 2004). In particular, in terms of his influence on Gülen’s approach to Sufism, ibn al-Arabi’s *Futuhat al-Makkiya* (*The Meccan Revelations*) deserves to be noted.

<sup>558</sup> Ibid, 147.

<sup>559</sup> Ibid.

<sup>560</sup> See, *ibid*, 172-190.

From this consideration, Gülen confirms that sobriety is more objective, secure, straightforward and a few steps higher than intoxication.<sup>562</sup> For him, the preference of intoxication to sobriety is a view of the intoxicated themselves when overpowered by the state. In order to be within Islamic truth, any intoxicated state is bound to be filtered through and valued by *ijtihad* based upon the Qur'an and Sunna. In this sense, Gülen insists that while intoxication is the way of some saints, sobriety with knowledge, consciousness, wakefulness and self-possession is the way of the Prophets and the purified scholars.<sup>563</sup> Wakefulness and self-possession enable those following the way of the Prophet and his Companions to never fall into confusion resulting from intoxication and absorption.<sup>564</sup> Being in constant 'God-consciousness,' they "see that all things other than He are but drops from the endless ocean of the Divine Existence and, despite their self-possession, they cannot distinguish a drop from the ocean nor a particle of light from the sun nor the mirror from what is reflected therein because they are deeply immersed in God's Existence."<sup>565</sup> Moreover, Gülen is convinced that the Prophetic way and the way of the Companions have always maintained that everything is from God, not that everything is God. Contrary to those who follow the path of yearning, spiritual ecstasy, and spiritual discovery, those who stress knowledge and seek to reach their destination

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<sup>561</sup> See further for Gülen's consideration of the dangers in following the doctrine of the Unity of Being, Gülen, "What is 'Unity of Being' (Wahdat al-Wujud)? Does it Conform in Any Way to the Teachings of Islam?," in en.fgulen.com.

<sup>562</sup> Gülen, *The Emerald Hills of the Heart 2*, 129.

<sup>563</sup> Ibid.

<sup>564</sup> Ibid. 189.

<sup>565</sup> Ibid, 150.

through the knowledge of God (*ma'rifa*) “spend their lives traveling toward God, progressing ‘in’ and progressing ‘from’ Him on the wings of knowledge and the knowledge of God. They seek to realize the meaning of: There is no power and strength save with God.”<sup>566</sup>

By preferring sobriety, thus, Gülen visualizes the rationalizing process of personal spiritual experience toward its socialization in the Sufi path. To a certain degree, this process by practicing *ijtihad* recalls Weber’s theory of rationalization especially with respect to ‘the inner worldly asceticism.’<sup>567</sup> Although there is a remarkable bifurcation of Gülen’s Sufism and Weberian sociology in terms of their respective manifestations as will be discussed in Chapter 5, there are still discernable parallels between the two. To Weber, ‘this-worldly ascetics’ are those who transform this-worldly matters according to their other-worldly purpose; and, this transformation is to be realized not through ‘isolation from’ but by engagement in this world. For the actualization of the transformation, rationalization is a pre-requisite for an ascetic to accept the transformation rationally and systematize his/her life and work accordingly. Therefore, for Weber, the ideal type of this-worldly ascetic is a rationalist who rejects everything that is ethically irrational and aesthetic by being always ‘conscious’ in mastering of his/her conducts of life.<sup>568</sup>

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<sup>566</sup> Gülen, *The Emerald Hills of the Heart 1*, xxv.

<sup>567</sup> See, Max Weber, *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Talcott Parsons (New York: Scribner, 1976).

<sup>568</sup> Max Weber, *The Sociology of Religion* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press: 1993), 168 and 329.

Furthermore, just as Weber's ideal 'inner worldly ascetics,' Gülen pictures 'genuine Sufis' as those who neither separate themselves from society nor passively return/remain in society, but actively and voluntarily participate in this-worldly matters by self-supervision (*muraqaba*) and self-criticism (*muhasaba*) of their lives. For instance, in explaining the term "Self-Criticism," he asserts that "everyone who has planned his or her life to reach the horizon of a perfect, universal human being is conscious of this life and spends every moment of it struggling with himself or herself."<sup>569</sup> This representative passage illustrates that Gülen's Sufism is not simply a social-forwarded asceticism, but, more correctly, an 'activist Sufism.' In other words, this activist Sufism is, as Elisabeth Özdalga argues from the angle of Weberian theory, 'pietistic activism,' in which 'man of action' (*aksiyon insani*) "is inclined to work his or her best until this world is turned into a paradise."<sup>570</sup> In fact, Gülen sees his ideal of Sufi ascetics with respect to his distinctive concept of "man of action and thought" (*aksiyon ve düşünce insani*).<sup>571</sup> For him, action, which makes Islamic belief sustainable and alive, is vital for keeping up Islamic spirituality. Any spiritual experience in the Sufi path is vitalized by action, and action is in turn vitalized by the constant 'God-consciousness.' In a way echoing Weber's consideration of the economic actions of the Calvinist ascetics as the outcome of salvation anxiety and self-confidence in the belief of double predestination,<sup>572</sup> in Gülen, 'God-consciousness' in both fear and hope leads one to action, and through this action -

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<sup>569</sup> Gülen, *The Emerald Hills of the Heart* 1, 9.

<sup>570</sup> Özdalga, "Worldly Asceticism in Islamic Casting," 88-89.

<sup>571</sup> For Gülen's extensive conceptualization of the marriage of 'action and thought,' see, his *The Statue of Our Souls: Revival in Islamic Thought and Activism*, (Somerset, N.J.: Light 2005).

<sup>572</sup> Weber, *Protestant Ethic*, 65-66.

not mystical experience itself, one attains self-confidence amidst the uncertainty of his/her salvation. In this sense, one can read his explanation of a Sufi concept “Hope or Expectation” (*Raja*), as he describes; “Fear removes any feeling of security against God’s punishment, and hope saves the believer from being overwhelmed by despair. For this reason, one may be fearful even when all obligatory duties have been performed perfectly; one may be hopeful although he or she has been less than successful in doing good deeds.”<sup>573</sup> Through this consciousness of hope and fear, a Sufi lives in action, making his/her spiritual experience rationally valuable for and internally perpetuated toward salvation, organizing his/her life, behavior and work accordingly, and being ready to do everything for the sake of God, for His Approval and Pleasure.

As discussed, at the core of the sober and activist features of Sufism lies Gülen’s conviction of the sociality of Sufism. Among numerous passages, his evaluation of “Privacy and Seclusion” (*Halwat and Uzlat*), the most relevant discussion at issue, directly articulates this aspect:

Since the purpose of seclusion is to purify the heart of the love which is not directed toward God and to be always with the Beloved, those who always feel the presence of God while living among people and who continuously discern the Divine Unity amidst multiplicity are regarded as always being with God in seclusion. In contrast, however, the seclusion of others who, although they spend their lives in seclusion, have not purified their hearts from attachment to whatever is other than God, is a deception. Those who always feel themselves in the presence of God do not need to seclude themselves from people. Such people, in the words of Rumi, are like those who keep one foot in the sphere of Divine commandments and turn the other, like a compass needle, round the world. They experience ascent and descent at every moment. This is the seclusion recognized and preferred by the Prophets and saints.<sup>574</sup>

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<sup>573</sup> Gülen, *The Emerald Hills of the Heart 1*, 40.

<sup>574</sup> *Ibid*, 19.

Just as sociality is the essence of Islam, in Gülen schema, being amidst the people is the substance of Sufism. To realize God-consciousness in daily life among people is a seclusion legitimated by the Prophets and amplified by Rumi's saying. This seclusion is, in another expression, "renunciation by heart, not physical severance" (*kalben terk, kesben değil*), one of the core concepts of Gülen's thought of Islam.<sup>575</sup> By "renunciation by heart," he means that while in this world, one must not attach him/herself to any worldly success or failure; one must not let this world get into his/her heart, make him/her intoxicated, blur his/her eyes or make him/her forget about the other world.<sup>576</sup> In so doing, he/she can dominate this temporary world without any of conflict feeling toward it, being able to work hard and be as rich as *Qarun*.<sup>577</sup> Poverty, the kernel of Gülen's proposed Sufi way, is a reference to "renunciation by heart" from all transient things and being in this world toward Divine Attributes and Essence. Thus, to Gülen, genuine Sufis "are the royalty in the Gardens of Paradise, but they live life in such a way that they attach no importance to other things."<sup>578</sup>

Regarding these aspects of Gülen's socially engaged Sufism, a point must be made that Gülen does by no means minimize or exclude Sufism as a personal spirituality. Rather, as the sober and active engagement in society is a consequent path that deepens and enriches one's spiritual experience, his socially engaged Sufism exists as the sum of

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<sup>575</sup> Gülen, "Mü'min, Zengin de Olsa Mütevazî Olmalı" (A True Believer Should Be Humble Regardless of His Richness), in tr.fgulen.com.

<sup>576</sup> Gülen, *Kur'an'dan İdrake Yansıyanlar*, (Istanbul: 2000).

<sup>577</sup> Gülen, "Mü'min, Zengin de Olsa Mütevazî Olmalı."

<sup>578</sup> Gülen, *The Emerald Hills of the Heart* 2, 73. See, further, for Gülen's clarification of "renunciation by heart" with a list of four reasons, *Sızıntı*, vol. 11 (May 1989), 124.

individual spirituality. From this perspective, it is neither the non-orthodox Turkish Sufism, which, as noted in Chapter 2, has long tended to pursue personal mystical experiences through a renunciation of the normal world. Nor does it hold the institutionalized form of *tariqa*, which requires personal bond to it. Instead, being intrinsically linked to his ‘Sufism without Sufi orders,’ Gülen’s socially engaged Sufism is a reformulation of the tradition of the culturally embedded Sufism, which I demonstrated in length in Chapter 2. In this reformulation in the contemporary context lies Gülen’s distinctive approach to Sufism. The most apparent elaboration of Gülen in such a revival is well preserved in his advocacy of dialogue in succession to Sufi tradition, which would be named ‘dialogic Sufism.’ This ‘dialogic Sufism’ will show Gülen’s concern on the goal, the methodology and the direction of his socially engaged Sufism in the contemporary conditions.

### *Dialogic Sufism*

Gülen’s concept of ‘tolerance and dialogue’ is the most well known and examined aspect of his thought.<sup>579</sup> As Gülen himself and other scholars of him unanimously point out, his concept of ‘tolerance and dialogue’ has an inseverable link to Sufism.<sup>580</sup> As a matter of fact, inclusivism is popularly viewed as a characteristic of Sufism represented

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<sup>579</sup> As a notable example, Ünal and Williams concludes that “Gülen is an adamant supporter and promoter of inter-faith dialogue.” Ünal and Williams, *Advocate of Dialogue*, 193-304. See also, Jill Carol, *A Dialogue of Civilisation: Gulens Humanistic Ideals and Humanistic Discourse*, (New Jersey: Light, 2007).

<sup>580</sup> For a representative, see, David Capes, “Tolerance in the Theology and Thought of A. J. Conyers and Fethullah Gülen.”



by many renowned Sufis, notably Rumi and Ibn Arabi, and especially compared to the legalistic and fundamentalist tendency of Islam. Lester Kurtz attributes the Sufi inclusiveness to the spiritual sphere of Sufism, in which “the boundaries [between Sufis and others] disappear in the same manner that national boundaries on earth become invisible when the planet is viewed from the moon.”<sup>581</sup> Without doubt, Gülen’s idea of tolerance intrinsically relies on the inclusive feature of Sufism, as he himself has openly confessed. In particular, Gülen has never hesitated to express his debt to and appreciation for the Turkish Sufi tradition throughout his works as noted earlier. Most remarkably, his pioneering idea of “Turkish Muslimness” (*Türk Müslümanlığı*) is the direct expression of such appreciation.

Gülen’s “Turkish Muslimness,” which crystallizes his view on Turkish Islam, stresses the Islamic root of Turkishness. He considers Turkishness and Islam as an inseparable unity, insisting that the Turks became a nation and found their true character when they adopted Islam.<sup>582</sup> At the core of this idea lies his deep appreciation for Turkish Sufism and great Sufis. Therein Sufism is depicted as a cultural reality, which has long been cumulated and embedded through an internalizing and vitalizing process of a spirit of tolerant and humanitarian love. Gülen states:

Turkish Islam is composed of the main, unchanging principles of Islam found in the Qur’an and Sunna, as well as in the forms that its aspects open to interpretation assumed during Turkish history, together with Sufism. More than any other Muslim country, Sufism has spread among the Turks in both Central Asia and Turkey. This is why Turkish

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<sup>581</sup> Lester Kurtz, “Gülen’s Paradox: Combining Commitment and Tolerance,” *The Muslim World*, Volume 95/3 (July 2005), 377.

<sup>582</sup> Can, *Ufuk Turu*, 34-35.

Islam always has been broader, deeper, more tolerant and inclusive, and based on love. If we can breathe this spirit into the modern world's carcass, I hope it will gain life.<sup>583</sup>

Thus, Sufism for Gülen is a grounding element of Turkish Islam, whose core characteristics of tolerance, inclusiveness and love were established with Turks' embrace of Sufism. Further, his differentiation of the wide-spread influence of Sufism in Turkish context than any other Islamic regions assumes a Turkish form of Sufism. In consonance with "Turkish Muslimness," Gülen indeed presupposes not *the* homogenous Sufism but *a* dynamic Sufism. Just as Turkish Islam exists, there is also a Turkish-characterized Sufism with its specific history and characteristics, which appeared from the deep incorporation of Sufism into the fabric of Turkish Islam from the very beginning. Like that of Turkish Islam, Turkish Sufism has a Central Asian root, as Gülen describes that the early Turkish dervishes in central Asia accepted the way of tasawwuf, the spiritual life of Islam, and brought it to Anatolia.<sup>584</sup> Once introduced by those wandering dervishes, Sufism soon spread and greatly advanced in Anatolia by a number of great Anatolian Sufis. Gülen writes:

The teaching of tasawwuf remains to certain extent in every corner of our society. Everyone took a benefit from it. The influence of tasawwuf on Turkish society is stronger and deeper than any other Islamic country. A custom such as to see oneself as lower than others; to see others higher than oneself and to give priority to others over oneself was impregnated to this nation from its very beginning by Sufi authorities such as Ahmed Yesevi, Yunus Emre, Mevlana Celaleddin-i Rumi and Hacı Bektaş Veli... That soft and inclusive worldview and attitude gain important place and value toward Allah, and become a unifying element of social life... This understanding exists in almost all individuals in the Turkish nation... [If not] At least, it exists potentially and in a way to come out at any moments.<sup>585</sup>

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<sup>583</sup> Hulusi Turgut, "Nurculuk," *Sabah*, 23-31 Jan 1997.

<sup>584</sup> "Türkiye Müslümanlığı," *Sabah*, 23 January 1997.

<sup>585</sup> Pope, "Interview with Gülen."

This is Gülen's concrete answer to a question of whether there was a contribution of tasawwuf to the tolerant attitude of Ottomans more than any other nations. As clearly shown, Gülen appreciates the soft, humble and inclusive Sufism initiated by Yasawi, Rumi, Emre and Bektash, and affirms its continuant existence as a cultural heritage of Turks. He further stresses that Turkish Muslimness is always widely open to Islamic spiritual life, tasawwuf, along with the Qur'an and Sunna, and this is why tekkes and zaviyas continue to exist together with fiqh madrassas.<sup>586</sup>

Gülen's interpretation of Turkish Sufism as an embedded reality further leads him to perceive it as a shared experience and inherited heritage of Turks. For Gülen, Turks are the heirs of humanitarian Sufism, the most extensive, expanding and universal culture of love and tolerance.<sup>587</sup> This assignment of Sufism specific to Turkishness reflects to a certain extent a 'collective consciousness' in Durkheimian term, which denotes the supra-individual sphere of transcendent values that is ultimately rooted in a society and gives meaning to its inhabitants' existential predicaments by tying them to society.<sup>588</sup> Indeed, several passages of Gülen's writings describe Turkish Sufism as a collective memory that maintains an Islamic worldview of openness and tolerance. A close look at the concept of his "Turkish Muslimness," however, reveals that Gülen places the humanitarian Sufism in a layer deeper than such a socially inherited collective consciousness. More appropriately, it is 'a national spirit of Turkish Muslimness in that as much as Sufism is a

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<sup>586</sup> "Dogmalar Savaşı Yaşıyoruz," *Zaman*, 14 August 1995.

<sup>587</sup> Gülen, "Vurana Elsiz, Sovene Dilsiz" [No Reaction to Those Who Beat and Swear], in *Fethullah Gülen'in Konuşma ve Yazılarında Hoşgörü. ve Diyalog İklimi*, eds. Camcı, Selçuk and Kudret Ünal (Merkür Yayınları. Izmir, 1998). 159.

<sup>588</sup> Emile Durkheim, *The Division of Labor in Society*, (NY: The Free Press, 1984).

spirit of Islam, Turkish Sufism is a spirit of Turkish Islam. This spirit in Gülen's implication does not exactly coincide with the Durkhemian 'collective consciousness' that gives priority to social collectivity over individuality. Rather, the definition of Sufism as a spirit of Turkishness indicates Gülen's concern on both collectivity and individuality, which is remarkably preserved in his concept of '*shakhshi manevi*.' As one of the most distinctive terms of his thought, '*shakhshi manawi*,' which literally means 'spiritual personality,' denotes 'collective spiritual personality,' a foundational ideology of the Gülen movement that will be examined in detail in chapter 5. To the extent that this concept refers to 'collective or shared spirituality embedded in person in society,' humanitarian Sufism also serves as a prominent means of such a '*shakhshi manawi*.' In tune with a 'collective spiritual personality,' Gülen pictures Sufism as a culturally inherited spirit, a much broader, deeper and essential reality than a narrowly-confined social and/or political element.<sup>589</sup> As noted earlier, for him, Sufism is Islamic spirituality, which was most deeply practiced as a lifestyle by the Prophet and the Companions. In a similar sense, the Turkish form of humanitarian Sufism has long been inherited as a cultural spirit of lifestyle and an ordinary fact for Turks.

The virtue of the humanitarian love of Turkish Sufism as a *shakhshi manawi* naturally constitutes Gülen's spiritual subconscious personality, determining his idea of Sufism. However, Gülen does not simply adopt and repeat the ideas of great Turkish Sufis, but further tries to reactivate and awake such a *shakhshi manawi* in the consciousness of contemporary Turks in order to present it to the world. In other words,

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<sup>589</sup> Gülen, "Bazı İddialar Üzerine Sorulan Sorulara Verdiği Cevaplar," *Aksiyon*, June 6, 1998.

as Ergene points out, starting from the foundation laid by the Turkish Sufis, Gülen has rebuilt that inherited humanism and understanding of Turko-Islamic Sufism in a way fitting to serve contemporary society and meet its needs.<sup>590</sup> In fact, where possible in his articles, Gülen tries to articulate the Islamic message of humanism to readers in the midst of secular society, as, for instance, he asserts;

If we can spread globally the Islamic understanding of such heroes of love as Niyazi Misri, Yunus Emre, and Mawlana Rumi, and if we can extend their messages of love, dialogue, and tolerance to people who are thirsty for this message, everyone will run toward the embrace of love, peace, and tolerance that we represent.<sup>591</sup>

This passage illuminates Gülen's distinctive approach, that is, his consideration and effort to revive the tradition of humanitarian love in the contemporary context. Following his quotation of Rumi's saying as mentioned earlier, it is like that Gülen turns one foot, like a compass needle, round the contemporary world, on the axis of the other foot in the sphere of the Sufi tradition. In this sense, his presentation is a contemporary recast of the Sufi tradition, which distinguishes it from the tradition.

Above all, in tune with the contemporary globalization, Gülen's idea covers a much broader context than those of Turkish Sufis in the tradition. Beyond this ostensible difference, Ergene further notes that compared to an introvert's understanding of Rumi, Emre and Bektash that limits their practices of tolerance and dialogue in the code of their respective schools and social environments, "Gülen opens up and transforms this framework and vision to include all peoples of the world, Muslims and non-Muslims

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<sup>590</sup> Enes Ergene, "M. Fethullah Gülen and His Movement: A Common-Sense Approach to Religion and Modernity," in en.fgulen.com.

<sup>591</sup> Gülen, *Toward a Global Civilization of Love and Tolerance*, 60-61.

alike.”<sup>592</sup> As noted above, in fact, Gülen’s works, which include not only Turkish Sufis but also many non-Turkish Sufis, indicate that his thought is beyond the nationalistic limitation. Although he relies on his reference to Turkish Sufis as naturally as his *shakhshi manawi*, all Sufis, Turkish and non-Turkish alike, in his thought are synthesized and instrumentalized for his projection of the humanitarian love.

From another perspective, Gülen’s understanding of the humanitarian love is in the line of the other characteristics of his Sufism. Particularly, extending his socially engaged Sufism, Gülen re-rationalizes the traditional virtue in accordance to ‘contemporary logos,’ presupposing consequent actions in the globalizing world. In doing so, he firmly holds, the humanitarian love becomes socialized, more correctly, globally actualized for the contemporary needs. As a result comes his advocacy of dialogue, which points to a wider, more active and socially involved vision than those of the other Sufis in the past.

In Gülen’s thought, dialogue is a very essential need of today’s world, and Sufism is a way to provide such a need. In combination, it can be called ‘dialogic Sufism.’ By ‘dialogic Sufism,’ I intend to point out ‘Gülen’s proposing method of a mutual and active understanding on the basis of the humanitarian Sufism.’ Dialogic Sufism is derived from Gülen’s methodological concern of the principle that “there is no weapon in the universe stronger than the weapon of love.”<sup>593</sup> Accordingly, it markedly differs from dialectical vision (representatively Hegelian methodology) that is essentially a divisional approach to describe opposing factors. Specifically, Gülen’s dialogic Sufism excludes the method

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<sup>592</sup> Ergene, “M. Fethullah Gülen and His Movement.”

<sup>593</sup> Cited from Sarıtoprak and Griffith, “Fethullah Gülen and the ‘People of the Book’.”

of tariqas, which, as Gülen himself evaluates, has historically shown divisions in society. By the same token, dialogic Sufism is not political. It is not a method *reacting* to problems as represented by the case of ‘Jihad by a sword’ (*Jihad bis-saif*) of Sayyid Qutb,<sup>594</sup> but a method *acting* harmoniously with any given context. As such a method, dialogic Sufism acts as a cultural mediator and humanistic bridge between the past and the present, the East and the West, rationalism/materialism and spiritualism, and between different civilizations, religions and cultures, obliterating difference and distinction between ‘us and others.’ Therefore, Gülen’s dialogic Sufism aims to provide an alternative solution to contemporary human problems. It is no wonder that one may find a parallel between Gülen’s dialogic Sufism and the recent scholarly discourse of Islam on ‘dialogic model,’ which calls for a dialogue between the West and Islamic fundamentalism.<sup>595</sup> Yet, the two are obviously different in terms of the former’s consideration of Sufism at its theoretical and methodological axis. In addition, Gülen himself has long been a practitioner of dialogue. Thus, his rationale of dialogic Sufism is a reflection of his own experiential reality. To Gülen and his followers, dialogic Sufism is not simply a theoretical speculation, but more importantly a pragmatic and systematic guideline of a paradigmatic alternative solution to the contemporary problems, which is accompanied with action.

In Gülen’s thought, dialogic Sufism manifests itself with various concepts such as love, compassion, forgiveness and humility, all of which are centered on the

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<sup>594</sup> See, Sayyid Qutb, *Milestones* (Indianapolis: American Trust Publications, 1990).

<sup>595</sup> As a representative study, see, Roxanne Euben, *Enemy in the Mirror: Islamic Fundamentalism and the Limits of Modern Rationalism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999).

humanitarian approach to dialogue. Gülen defines dialogue as an activity of forming a bond between two or more people. To form such a bond means to him to have human beings at the axis of dialogue. Following this definition, Gülen emphasizes tolerance and dialogue as two roses of the emerald hills of humanity.<sup>596</sup>

Gülen conceptualizes tolerance in the sphere of Sufism. In his introduction to the *Emerald Hills of the Heart*, he outlines a list of eleven principles of Sufism, and signifies the tolerant nature of Sufism with three principles: “overflowing with Divine Love and getting along with all other beings in the realization (originating from Divine Love) that the universe is a cradle of brotherhood,” “giving preference or precedence to the well-being and happiness of others,” and “being open to love, spiritual yearning, delight, and ecstasy.”<sup>597</sup> As these principles inclusively imply, Gülen considers tolerance as a prerequisite quality in following the Sufi way. He deepens this underlined quality especially with respect to Sufic love, notably, in describing the Sufi knowledge of God (*marifa*):

Knowledge of God does not consist of abstract knowledge; in its true form, it is transformed into love. We cannot remain indifferent to someone in whom we believed and then grew to know well. After belief and knowledge comes love. Love is the crown of belief in God and knowledge of Him. Love is open to everyone according to his or her level. Love, which seeks to deepen itself, always travels on the horizon of “increase,” asking: “Isn’t there more?” On the one hand, sacred knowledge increases, giving rise to increasing in love, which causes knowledge to increase still further.<sup>598</sup>

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<sup>596</sup> See, Gülen, *Toward a Global Civilization of Love and Tolerance*, 50-53.

<sup>597</sup> Gülen, *The Emerald Hills of the Heart 1*, xv-xvi.

<sup>598</sup> Gülen, “The Culture of the Heart.”



To Gülen, love is the way of the Prophets, which leads one to the most direct way of going to the hearts of people, the way of attaining the ultimate goal, God's pleasure.<sup>599</sup> In this sense, he considers an *arif*, who has spiritual knowledge of God, as one who "always tastes peace and talks about peace in a downpour of 'light.'"<sup>600</sup> In Gülen's rationale, only by love can humanism be realized. Since humanity is endowed with the potentiality to reflect the nature of Divine Existence that comprises all of the Divine Names and to attain perfection in all fields, "in truth and in God's sight, humanity is greater than the universe."<sup>601</sup> A true transformation of the potentiality into reality relies on one's love for the Almighty Creator and consequently for all humanity as His most polished mirrors and objects of the Creator's own love.<sup>602</sup> On this basis, Gülen defines humanism as a doctrine of love and humanity. And, in this context, he signifies the tolerant behaviors of early Turkish Sufis like Yasawi, Rumi, Emre and Bektash, by referring to them as initiators of Turkish humanism of love and as its foremost representatives beyond time and space.

Gülen regards his proposing way of poverty as a way to realize love. According to him, having awareness of poverty and nothingness before God leads one to be humble among people. In the detailed process of this journey, a dervish first initiates learning the Qur'an, then, builds relations with all existence, living or non-living. In this relationship, he/she "is to be loving and tolerant toward everyone, to see the universe as a cradle of brotherhood/sisterhood." The dervishes in this stage "love and embrace everything, repel

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<sup>599</sup> See, Gülen, *Toward a Global Civilization of Love and Tolerance*, 1-23.

<sup>600</sup> Gülen, *The Emerald Hills of the Heart 1*, 148.

<sup>601</sup> Gülen, *The Emerald Hills of the Heart 2*, 292.

<sup>602</sup> Gülen, "Respect for Humankind," in *The Fountain*, Issue 53 (January-March 2006).

hostilities with love, and evil with good,” “thinking that the road that they are to follow is the road of not showing resentment, but rather that of patience and tolerance.” In the final stage, dervishes become persons of peace and spiritual vision, to whom there is no difference whether good comes from friends or evil from enemies.”<sup>603</sup> This process representatively shows Gülen’s conviction that love and tolerance are essential qualities to be ‘a true dervish.’<sup>604</sup> By these virtues, a dervish can reach the rank of the universal man (*al-insan al-kamil*), who is a man of perfect compassion embracing every one in need of attention, support and maintenance in locating himself in the body of society.<sup>605</sup>

This understanding of love shapes Gülen’s tolerance-based humanitarian worldview, and provides the weapon of his dialogic Sufism. To him, dialogue in a true sense is a sublimation and pragmatic extension of humanism, which can be only accomplished by mutual respect with love and tolerance. In this sense, Gülen considers, presents and promotes dialogue as an alternative solution to problems that contemporary humanity faces individually and communally.

According to Gülen, the essential problem of contemporary humanity is the loss of true humanism, as this loss causes and appears with widespread hatred and enmity. Hatred and enmity have produced many “beasts who have lost their humanity” by closing the road of tolerance, and these beasts have in turn accelerated the loss of humanism.<sup>606</sup> For Gülen, the only way to disentangle this real and critical danger to humanity, therefore,

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<sup>603</sup> Gülen, *The Emerald Hills of the Heart 2*, 263-265.

<sup>604</sup> Ibid.

<sup>605</sup> Gülen, *The Emerald Hills of the Heart 2*, 292.

<sup>606</sup> See, Gülen, “Forgiveness,” *The Fountain*, Issue 30 (April - June 2000).

is to revitalize love and tolerance, particularly, as exemplified by the Sufi tradition of humanism. As a representative case, Gülen gives a high voice on excessive materialism, which is directly and indirectly related to the loss of true humanism. Noting that “there are any material shortages in the world,” Gülen points out inequitable distribution, which originates from the self-egoism of the material-centric mind.<sup>607</sup> Against this backdrop, he promotes dialogic Sufism, firmly holding it as a way of recovering of spirituality ‘as opposite to but still within’ the material-centric context. In his schema, dialogic Sufism is by no means a way of rejecting this world, but rather a way of protecting and empowering one’s spirituality against his/her egoistic carnal-self (*nafs*), which causes only constant conflict with others. Thus, the solution lies in one’s rationalized acknowledgement of the mutual existence, tolerance and love and his/her consequent actions. In this way, which enables one to acknowledge others as equal beings not as anti-beings, one can also (re) find his/her ‘true identity.’

#### 4.3. Is Gülen a Sufi?

All the four discussed characteristics of Gülen’s Sufism, ‘Islamic Spirituality,’ ‘Sufism without Sufi orders,’ ‘socially engaged Sufism’ and ‘dialogic Sufism,’ synthetically disclose that Sufism remains very much at the heart of Gülen’s thought. His conviction of Sufism, however, seems to be contradictory to his firm rejection of a tariqa-affiliation. As noted in the examination of his life in Chapter 2, Gülen has empathetically

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<sup>607</sup> Gülen, *The Emerald Hills of the Heart* 2, v.

insisted throughout numerous writings and interviews that he has neither been a Sufi shaykh, nor has his movement been a Sufi order. In fact, this apparent paradox has centered studies on Gülen upon a politically controversial and academically debatable issue of his Sufi identity. As a comprehensive approach to the Sufi orientation of Gülen's thought with the characteristic focus, this chapter necessitates revisiting this cliché question. By reviewing the existing studies on the issue, the discussed characteristics will be highlighted in a way to situate Gülen's Sufi tendency in the contemporary academic discourse.

The question of whether or not Gülen is a Sufi began to be circulated with the political investigations in 1990's to identify Gülen's alleged political Islam project. It followed several critical studies, representatively, Faik Bulut's *Kim Bu Fethullah Gülen?* (Who is This Fethullah Gülen?), Emin Değer's *Bir Cumhuriyet Düşmanının Portresi ya da Fethullah Hocaefendi'nin Derin Misyonu* (The Portrait of a Republic Enemy or The Deep Mission of Fethullah Hocaefendi), and Ergun Poyraz's *Fethullah'ın Gerçek Yüzü* (The Real Face of Fethullah).<sup>608</sup> These studies depict a common picture of him as a leader of a tariqa, which is, like any other Sufi orders, an unnecessary, harmful and outlawed institution in the Republic of Turkey. In their views, Gülen is a Sufi shaykh because he called people for the fundamentalist religious beliefs and practices with his Sufi-nuanced passionate preaches and writings, and organized them into a divisional sect. This divisional sect, to them, is a tariqa, which Gülen has imbued with a secret but ultimate aim to establish a Shari'a state, challenging and threatening the secular regime of the

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<sup>608</sup> Faik Bulut, *Kim Bu Fethullah Gülen? Dünü-Bugünü-Hedefi* (Istanbul: Ozan, 1998); Emin M. Değer, *Bir Cumhuriyet Düşmanının Portresi ya da Fethullah Hocaefendi'nin Derin Misyonu* (Istanbul: Cumhuriyet, 2000); Poyraz, *Said-i Nursi'den Demirel ve Ecevit'e Fethullah'ın Gerçek Yüzü*.

Turkish Republic (*Laik Türkiye Cumhuriyeti*). However, it is easily readable that from an academic point of view, this contention has significant problems. To begin with, the studies identify a *tariqa* as a sectarian institution that does nothing but harm to the unity and the common good of society. Reflecting a tendency that assumes virtually any organized Islamic groups as Sufi orders, they consider Sufism as a discipline that produces such mystical orders. Given this, they evaluate Gülen, putting him into their *a priori* definition. Certainly, this approach is neither academic nor supported by the majority of Sufis themselves. Instead, it maintains a highly political stance, exclusively relying on the negative image of *tariqa* enforced by and since the establishment of the Kemalist Republic. As a remarkable example, Poyraz claims that there is a close tie between the Gülen movement and the Unification Church, which is a typical representative of negative religions organizations in the Turkish public mind.<sup>609</sup> By relating the two groups, the author shows his definitive approach to a *tariqa* not as ‘a Sufi order within Islam’ but as ‘a universal mystical movement,’ which only brings about a social and national division.

It followed a number of ‘more academic-driven’ studies, which directly stands up with the *tariqa*-associated confinement of Gülen’s Sufism. These studies unanimously and basically agree upon Gülen’s Sufi identity. However, they also point out that the idea of the equation of Sufism with *tariqa* is not justifiable but implausible. The studies stress that Gülen can be considered as a Sufi, but not from a *tariqa*-centric perspective. A

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<sup>609</sup> See, Poyraz, *Fethullah'ın Gerçek Yüzü*, 345-348.

question of ‘then, from what perspective?’ has led the scholars to examine the topic from different angles and to put it into different classifications.

Zeki Saritoprak initiated the ‘more academic-driven’ approach to Gülen’s Sufi identity. Arguing that “Gülen’s way of Sufism cannot be confined by the framework of a specific Sufi order,”<sup>610</sup> he instead portrays Gülen in the line of the major Sufi figures who did not actually found any Sufi order. Introducing Gülen’s doctrinal and practical links to Sufism, Saritoprak contends that “Gülen can be called a Sufi, albeit a Sufi in his own way.”<sup>611</sup> Thomas Michel concurs with Saritoprak’s view, and argues that Gülen is not a man of tariqa.<sup>612</sup> In particular, he challenges the popular placement of Gülen in the Naqshbandi order. According to Michel, although Gülen shares with the order certain features of his Sufi ideas like Shariah-oriented Sufism, Gülen differs from the order especially in terms of his more active-based Sufism than the Naqshbandi focus on disciple’s spiritual development with the monitoring of the shaykh. From this difference, he underlines the Neo-Sufi quality of Gülen’s Sufi vision.<sup>613</sup> In fact, Gülen’s promotion of activist Sufism has led several scholars to classify his thought in the category of neo-Sufism. Among such scholars as Olivier Roy<sup>614</sup> and Hakan Yavuz,<sup>615</sup> Erol Gulay gives a

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<sup>610</sup> Saritoprak, “Fethullah Gülen: A Sufi in His Own Way,” 169.

<sup>611</sup> Ibid.

<sup>612</sup> Michel, “Sufism and Modernity in the thought of Fethullah Gülen.”

<sup>613</sup> Michel clarifies this view in his another article, “Turkish Islam in Dialogue with Modern Society: the Neo-Sufi Spirituality of the Gülen Movement.”

<sup>614</sup> Olivier Roy, *Globalized Islam: The Search for a New Ummah* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 225.

<sup>615</sup> Yavuz, *Islamic Political Identity in Turkey*; especially see, the chapter entitled “The Neo-Nur Movement of Fethullah Gülen.”

more detailed account. He notes a synthesis between scripturalism and experientialism in Gülen's teachings, which is analogous with the neo-Sufi trend.<sup>616</sup> In this synthesis, to Gulay, Gülen puts forward his theology of pietistic and ceaseless engagement in the activities of *hizmet*. According to him, due to Gülen's theological emphasis on *hizmet*, he is conceptually different not only from the Naqshbandiyya but also from Said Nursi, both of whom do not stress this-worldly activity as a foundational principle of Sufism as Gülen does. Highlighting this activist and social aspect, Gulay depicts Gülen to be a contemporary representative of neo- and reformed Sufism. Ergene approaches the issue from a different angle. Unlike the classification of neo-Sufism, he analyzes Gülen's Sufism in the traditional line.<sup>617</sup> Although he also notes Gülen's activist Sufi vision as a significant departure from the Sufi tradition, Ergene nevertheless colors a picture of Gülen with the humanitarian tradition of Turkish Sufism. Thus, he calls Gülen a contemporary Rumi, opening to a scholarly discourse on Gülen with respect to the Turkish Sufi tradition.

Undeniably, these later academic studies have shed light on the study on Gülen, greatly contributing to a better understanding of Gülen's Sufi identity in a way of clarifying the discussed characteristics of Gülen's Sufism. Nevertheless, the proposed classifications of Gülen's Sufi identity with the neo-Sufi category or in the line of the tradition can be interpreted as being contradictory to each other. It seems to me that each

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<sup>616</sup> Erol Gulay, "The Gülen Phenomenon: A Neo-Sufi Challenge to Turkey's Rival Elite?," *Critique: Critical Middle Eastern Studies*, 16/1 (Spring 2007), 37–61.

<sup>617</sup> Ergene, *Geleneğin Modern Çağa Tanıklığı*.

of them does not take the characteristics of Gülen's Sufism synthetically, disregarding some of them.

As a matter of fact, several aspects of Gülen's Sufism reflect some of the main characteristics of the neo-Sufi thesis that was examined in Chapter 2. Particularly, Gülen's consideration of Sufism as Islamic spirituality and as a socially engaged discipline corresponds to the 'more Shari'a-minded, less ecstatic nature' and 'active involvement in worldly affairs through assertion of the right to exercise *ijtihad*.' Despite this commonality, it is overstepping to group the two in one basket. In sharp contrast to the neo-Sufi tendency of 'the will to take political and military forces in defense of Islam in reaction to the reform currency,' Gülen's Sufism as underlined in his dialogic Sufism is essentially apolitical, as it rejects any reaction to the world – not to mention of its political involvement. Far more definitely, Gülen's Sufism refutes the proclaimed 'new' essence of neo-Sufism, which presupposes the innovation from and the discontinuity with pre-existent Sufi tradition. All the characteristics of Gülen's Sufism are by no means new or innovational. Not only 'Islamic spirituality,' but also the other characteristics are in continuance of the Sufi tradition: 'Sufism without Sufi orders' in the individual Sufi tradition, and 'socially engaged Sufism' and 'dialogic Sufism' in the Turkish Sufism. Although these characteristics are Gülen's own reformulation of the tradition in tune with contemporary needs, they are still far from 'new' innovations. In this sense, Gülen's Sufism repudiates the neo-Sufi classification, confirming the view of the critics of neo-Sufi thesis.

In terms of the continuance of the tradition, Ergene's consideration of Gülen as a contemporary Rumi seems more appropriate. Nonetheless, a close reading of Ergene's



study reveals that he disregards socially engaged Sufism, despite his extensive note on the activist and dialogic aspects of Gülen's Sufism with respect to the tradition. His thesis that 'Gülen is personally a Sufi, but his movement is not a tariqa' seems to be primarily based upon his preference of Sufism as a personal spiritual development in counter with the claim of Gülen's tariqa-affiliation. In other words, he seems to give priority to personal Sufism at the expense of the social aspect of Gülen's Sufism. However, in Gülen's Sufism, as noted above, one's personal spiritual experience should be linked to his/her sober reflection and active engagement in society, which make the experience alive and perpetuated in a way of benefiting others. This is socially engaged Sufism, which Gülen regards as the way of the Prophet, his Companions and great Sufis like Rumi with his further conceptualization of 'journey from God.' As a social manifestation of individual spirituality, this aspect of Sufism must not be confused with the institutionalized form of tariqa. As examined in detail in Chapter 2, instead of being confined in an institution, this dimension has been rooted in society as such a cultural entity as saint cults, and cumulated to constitute Turkish Sufism. Together with 'Sufism without Sufi orders,' this socially engaged Sufism clearly proves that Gülen's thought does not have any conceptual and doctrinal relation with tariqa. From this perspective, in response to Ergene's contention that "the Gülen movement is not a movement in the sense of Sufism," I would rather attempt to substitute "Sufism" with "tariqa."

As these two representative evaluations indicate, the characteristics of Gülen's Sufism require being approached synthetically to figure out Gülen's Sufi identity. Not separately but collectively, the characteristics make Gülen's Sufism distinctive and meaningful as a contemporary manifestation of Sufism. In this sense, one may read

Gülen's own synthesis of the core characteristics into his concept of the Universal Man (*al-insan al-kamil*), which, just as the goal of Sufism, in turn crystallizes his ideal type of Sufis. Having elaborated this concept in the concluding chapter of *Emerald Hills of the Heart 2*, Gülen regards the universal man as one, who, as the most comprehensive mirror of acts, Names and Attributes of God, 'sees' and causes others to 'see' Him.<sup>618</sup> According to Gülen, the Prophet Muhammad is the best universal man, who represents perfectly the essence of Islam; who "is perfectly conscious that he is one created by God and is extremely aware of his being a servant"; who is, with this God-consciousness, always humble and "never deviates into believing such doctrines as union and incarnation" that presume two independent and self-existent beings; who always displays good and excellence, living in accordance with good morals; and who, as the mirror of the two worlds, "always pursues a way to help others and to increase his knowledge of God."<sup>619</sup> As in this concept, the characteristics of Gülen's Sufism synthetically give clue to a better understanding of the implication of Gülen's words for his Sufi identity, resisting the scholarly categorizations and necessitating an approach to the issue from his own framework of Sufism.

Gülen does not explicitly clarify his own Sufi identity. A close look at his works and interviews leads one to assume that this is due to his concern about outsiders' misunderstanding and misinterpretation of his Sufi identity. For instance, Gülen resists the claim of non-Sufic orientation of Said Nursi's *Risalei Nur*, by pointing out the

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<sup>618</sup> Gülen, *The Emerald Hills of the Heart 2*, 289.

<sup>619</sup> *Ibid*, 289-302.

mistake of “mixing Sufism with dervish orders.”<sup>620</sup> Nevertheless, as noted above, his political opponents with their own apriori yardstick of the equalization of Sufism with tariqa have criticized him as one who conceals a Sufi identity and a secret mission. On the contrary, Gülen’s life and thought demonstrate that he has always been open and consistent about his position. On the one hand, throughout his life, he shows neither his affiliation with a tariqa nor practices similar to those of a tariqa. On the other hand, since as early as the late 1970’s, he has consistently clarified his own ideas of Sufism and tariqa, which this chapter characteristically examined. Indeed, clearer than any outsiders’ classifications, the examined characteristics make it safe to consider ‘Gülen as a Sufi but not from the perspective of tariqa.’ The following passage from Gülen’s interviews representatively confirms this contention. In responding to a newspaper allegation of his movement as “a nameless and indefinable Sufi movement,” Gülen answers:

Sufism is the spiritual life of Islam. None of representatives of Islam from *ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jama’a* in any period never stepped out from that spirituality... By describing this work [the Gülen movement] as ‘a nameless and indefinable Sufi movement,’ if it refers to people who are on the way of reaching Allah or strive for being a universal man, it is correct since there are no true believers who are not Sufis or not on this way of tasawwuf in that sense. However, if it [the description] is intended to issue a matter by confining it [the Gülen movement] with tariqa in terms of either the differences of collocutors concerning Sufi emotions and ideas or the differences of the representatives of them, in this sense, this work is neither tasawwuf nor tariqa.<sup>621</sup>

In the frame of the characteristics, this passage represents Gülen’s consideration of Sufism as Islamic spirituality, which is crystallized by his assertion that ‘opposing Sufism is opposing the essence of Islam.’ In this sense, the passage resists and further nullifies

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<sup>620</sup> Ünal and Williams, *Advocate of Dialogue*, 358.

<sup>621</sup> Gülen, “Adi Konulmamıs Bir Tasawuf Hareketi,” in *Fethullah Gülen’in Konuşma ve Yazılarında Hoşgörü. ve Diyalog İklimi*, (eds.) Camcı and Ünal, 257-258.

any attempt to bring Sufism down to the confinement of tariqa. This is the most explicit indication of ‘Sufism without Sufi orders.’ From this perspective, as Sarıtoprak rightly calls, ‘Gülen is a Sufi in his own way.’

By the same token, Gülen also rejects his movement to be called a tariqa. Indeed, at the center of the so far discussed four characteristics of Gülen’s Sufism lies his theoretical elaboration for the substance of Sufism especially by separating and distinguishing it from the institutional form of tariqa. This regard makes it safe to say that the conceptual framework of Gülen, which serves as the systematic guideline of his movement, excludes any perception of his movement in the boundary of tariqa.

If the movement is not a tariqa, then, what is its identity? This is another pivotal question, which constitutes scholarship on Gülen’s study, and which the next chapter will deal with. In the process to find a proper answer to this question, I will necessarily examine how and to what degree Gülen’s Sufism with the discussed four characteristics is manifested in his movement and its members. More specifically, this examination will proceed from the underlined finding that Gülen’s Sufism presupposes and requires the transformation of personal piety and spiritual experience into sober, active and dialogic engagement in society for the individual and collective benefit of human beings. On this basis, I will depict how this transformation is actualized in the interaction of the movement with contemporary contexts.

## CHAPTER 5

### THE PLACE OF SUFISM IN THE GÜLEN MOVEMENT

Therefore, the worldly life should be used in order to earn the afterlife and to please the One who has bestowed it. The way to do so is to seek to please Allah and, as an inseparable dimension of it, to serve immediate family members, society, country, and all of humanity accordingly. This service is our right, and sharing it with others is our duty. - Fethullah Gülen<sup>622</sup>

Fethullah Gülen is most popularly known as the leader of his name-associated Gülen movement. Regardless of diverse areas including politics, academia, media and public, his name is widely circulated with his leadership of the fastest growing religious community in Turkey.

Without doubt, despite the ongoing suspicion and denunciation by secularist Republic elites and media, the external and quantitative expansion of the movement within a half century since Gülen organized and supervised a series of the first summer camps in the late 1960's is quite dramatic. It is known today as a movement, which runs thousands of projects world-wide through its members of some six-million: its educational activities includes about 2000 schools and seven universities in more than ninety countries on five continents; its media initiatives involve the Zaman daily newspaper, the Samanyolu television channel, the Burç FM radio station, the Cihan News Agency, a number of magazines in diverse fields like *Aksiyon* (a weekly news magazine), *Sızıntı* (a scientific monthly), *Ekoloji* (an environment-related magazine), *Yeni Ümit* (a theological journal), and *The Fountain* (English language religious publication); and, it administers Asya Finans, one of the fastest growing financial institutions, İŞHAD (İş

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<sup>622</sup> Ünal and Williams, *Advocate of Dialogue*, 267.

*Hayatı Dayanışma Derneği*: Association of Solidarity with Working Life), an association of over 2000 businessmen and merchants, the Işık Insurance company and two modern hospitals.

The remarkable speed of the Gülen movement's external expansion has led scholarly discourse to focus on its success and to take into account Gülen's leadership. From various angles of academic disciplines, specialists seek reasons for this success. While some of them point out the organizational distinctiveness as the main reason, others pay attention to internal factors such as the doctrines, ideologies and disciplines of the movement. Albeit with different foci, many scholars take notice of Gülen's transformative power from his theoretical concepts such as action, dialogue and education to their systematizations as practical guidelines of the movement, which has convinced and mobilized millions of people to participate his project of *hizmet*.

In the line of this scholarly discourse, some recent scholars have begun to focus more deeply on the 'spiritual motivation' of the movement. For instance, as discussed in the previous chapter, the Weberian model of inner ascetics is employed to explain the religiously-motivated life of Gülen and his followers. However, the relationship of Sufism to Gülen and his movement has received little attention. In particular, compared to the role of Sufism in Gülen's life and thought that has still drawn several scholars' note, Sufi tendencies of the movement have been left almost unexamined save for some rough implications and suggestions.

At first glance, it may not be hard to imagine the involvement of Sufism in the movement. Deductively, the inseparable unity of Gülen and the movement is apparent; as the previous chapters demonstrated, Gülen's life and thought have an intrinsic link with

Sufism in the extent that he is a Sufi; thus, Gülen's conceptualization and practice of Sufism must affect and appear in the movement. On this hypothesis, the present chapter critically examines how to accurately describe the manifestations and the roles of Gülen's Sufism in his movement. Specifically, this topic will be approached with six sections. In the first section, I will clarify Gülen's position in the movement, which has been hotly debated with the critical consideration of his charismatic leadership as a Sufi shaykh of a tariqa. This clarification will give a direct clue for the question of whether the movement is a tariqa. Dealing with this identity issue in detail in the second section, I will elaborate Gülen's own conceptualized names for the movement, which reflect the previously-examined four characteristics of his Sufism. The third to the fifth section will examine the application of these Sufi-nuanced names in the nature of the movement, focusing on its membership, organizational structure and financial sources. The last section will analyze how Gülen's Sufism affects and appears in the activities of the movement in both individual and collective senses.

### 5.1. Gülen's leadership

Gülen's leadership of the Gülen movement has been a target of conflicting accusations and arguments. In particular, some critics raise a question about Gülen's charismatic authority over the movement, relating it as an evidence for the tariqa-identity of the movement. According to Hermansen, Bassam Tibi is one of such critics, who considers the movement as a tariqa and critiques it as such. It is a tariqa where Gülen

functions as the shaykh.<sup>623</sup> More popularly, the name *Fethullahcilar* has been circulated with a strong connotation of Gülen's dictatorial leadership of the movement.<sup>624</sup>

Gülen resolutely resists the claim that he is or aspires to be a Sufi shaykh of a *tariqa*, insisting, for instance:

I've never called myself a leader. I'm an ordinary man. A leader is someone with capabilities, genius, charisma, and high performance. I don't have any of these... I insist on not saying "leader" because I expressed my thoughts for 30 years on pulpits, and people sharing the same feelings and thoughts responded. For example, I said to them "Open university preparatory courses, open schools." As an expression of their respect for me, they listened to what I said. This might be a mistake, but they listened and we met at this point. I saw that just as I was saying "schools," a lot of people were saying "schools." They come to ask about other, especially religious issues as well. Sometimes they even ask about economic matters. I tell them that "such matters require expert knowledge," and send them to experts.<sup>625</sup>

As emphasized repeatedly, he asserts that he holds no charismatic or formalized authority over the movement; instead, he insists that he is an ordinary man who shares the same feelings and thoughts with people of the movement. In fact, his rationale - especially his view of 'Sufism without *tariqa*' - dismantles the role of a shaykh as a spiritual mediator between a disciple and God.

Despite Gülen's rejection, almost all scholars agree that he exhibits charismatic leadership of the movement. Looking at the issue from his followers' perspective, specialists such as Özdalga, Michel and Yavuz consider him as an inspirational and guiding leader. In particular, Fred Reed stresses Gülen's charisma as one that "evokes that [the role] of *murshid*, the exemplary leader in whom, the Sufis believe, the spirit of

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<sup>623</sup> Hermansen, "Understandings of 'Community' within the Gülen Movement."

<sup>624</sup> See, Nuriye Akman, "Fethullah Hoca Anlatiyor" [Fethullah Hodja presents], *Sabah*, 30 January 1995, 23; Ertugrul Ozkok, "Hoca Efendi Anlatiyor" [The Master Presents], *Hurriyet*, 24 January 1995, 19.

<sup>625</sup> Fethullah Gülen's Biography, in en.fgulen.com.



Mohammad lives on” and whose guidance covers “not only in matters of the spirit but also in the affairs of the City.”<sup>626</sup> However, like many other specialists, Reed’s sketch, which is based upon his observation of and interview with Gülen, does not give a further detailed and relational analysis of Gülen’s leadership and Sufism.

The most frequently applied concept regarding charismatic leadership in the study of Sufism is the Weberian sociological term of ‘charismatic authority.’ Michael Gilsenan’s 1960’s seminal work on modern Egyptian Sufism sheds light on how the concept can be applied to explain the origins and the development of a Sufi order.<sup>627</sup> Consequently, the study has greatly influenced much of later research at issue. An attempt to evaluate Gülen’s leadership of his movement from the perspective of the existing discourse on charisma would, on the one hand, benefits a better understanding of Gülen’s leadership, and on the other hand, contributes an examination of the validity of the existing discourse.

#### *Religious charisma: The Weberian model*

Weber defines charisma as an individual quality, which is believed and treated as an endowment of superhuman or supernatural powers. This natural quality is exceptional and beyond the reach of ordinary people’s ability, and as such, is considered to be divinely innate-given gift and becomes the source of charismatic leadership. For Weber, the legitimacy of charismatic authority is derived from the recognition of spiritual

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<sup>626</sup> Fred Reed, *Anatolia Junction* (Burnaby, British Columbia: Talon, 1999), 87.

<sup>627</sup> Gilsenan, *Saint and Sufi in Modern Egypt*.

endowment rather than tradition or legally established rulers. Charismatic authority provides a more radical warrant for innovation than either of the other two ideal types. However, charismatic authority is precarious by the fact of its origination as something out of the everyday and by its association with the charismatic individual. Charisma is a genuinely anti-traditional and anti-rational force, repudiating the past and evoking a specifically revolutionary force.<sup>628</sup> In its height, the followers of charismatic authority are subject to the anti-economic force of charisma.

Gilsenan applies the theory of the Weberian charismatic authority to examine an Egyptian Sufi order. In so doing, he argues that in the process of birth of a Sufi order, the shaykh played a central role in formulating the framework of a cognitive, moral and social order; he fulfilled certain expectations in patterns of behavior and articulated an authentic call before charisma would be granted to him by others; later on, his charismatic authority gained a strength by virtue of the belief of his followers, who began to consider and treat him as a mediator between them and Allah. More recently, Arthur Buchler further details the sources of charisma in the Sufi tradition.<sup>629</sup> In his comprehensive examination of Naqshbandi spiritual authority in the Punjab, Buchler concludes with a list of the four sources of religious charisma: mystical experience as the first source of charisma, spiritual lineage as its second, the shaykh as exemplary model of the Prophet as its third, and transmission of knowledge as the last. With this list, he

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<sup>628</sup> Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology*, eds. Guenther Roth and Claus Wittich (University of California Press, 1978 [1922]), v. 1, 244; and, *Sociology of Religion*, 46-79. For a detail, see, Weber, *On Charisma and Institution Building: Selected Papers*, edited and with an introduction by S. N. Eisenstadt (Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1968).

<sup>629</sup> Arthur Buehler, *Charisma and Exemplar: Naqshbandi Spiritual Authority in the Punjab, 1857-1947*, Ph.D. diss. (Harvard University, 1993).

specifically stresses that the concerned Naqshbandi shaykhs acted as mediators between believers and Muhammad, exclusively teaching the love of the spiritual mentor and the Prophet as the means to God. Such shaykhs are, in Buchler's term, "mediator-shaykhs," who have become the norm in contemporary Pakistan.

A close examination of both Gülen's life/thought and his followers' perception of him reveals significant differences of Gülen's leadership from the above discourse of charisma. Truly, one may find some parallels between the two, for instance, by noting Gülen's empathetic depiction of "Muhammadan Truth" as the ideal model of all Sufi ways and his unique ability to transmit religious/spiritual knowledge to his followers. Nonetheless, in almost all important senses, neither Gülen's life/thought nor his followers' testimonies illustrate the typical charismatic figure of a Sufi shaykh forward by the discourse.

To begin with, the superhuman or supernatural powers, the prerequisite qualities of the Weberian charisma are not supported in existing interview records of Gülen's followers. In a similar sense, Buchler's emphasis on mystical experience as the first source of charisma is not relevant to Gülen's leadership. Although Gülen's mystical experience, as noted in Chapter 3, serves in a certain degree to strengthen his personal belief and the fellowship of some members of the movement, it is an apparent exaggeration to claim a determinant role of such an experience in his leadership. Second, due to its revolutionary nature, the Weberian charisma is in essence political. In fact, considering Islam as a religion of politics, Weber suggests that Islam is prone to

charismatic movements.<sup>630</sup> Quite contrarily, Gülen is consistent to oppose any attempt to put Islam into a political confinement, instead advocating dialogic Sufism and guiding the apolitical activities of his movement. Third, as Gülen insists that he himself has no spiritual master,<sup>631</sup> his movement does not observe any practice relating to the spiritual lineage (*silsila*) or the master-disciple relationship. In the same sense, unlike Naqshbandi tradition, none of such concepts as a bond with the shaykh (*rabita*) or annihilation of the ego in the shaykh (*fana fi shaykh*) circulates among Gülen's followers. Rather, Gülen has directed the attention and affection of his followers not to himself, but to the Prophet and so to God. Thus, his leadership does not manifest the charismatic authority of "mediator-shaykh" between his followers and Allah found in the Naqshi context. Last but not least, it deserves to note that Weber exemplifies Prophets as the chief figures of his typology of charismatic authority, as he considers a prophet 'the individual bearer of charisma,' citing such religious figures as Zoroaster, Jesus, Muhammad, and the Buddha.<sup>632</sup> In a way of responding to this idea, Gülen insists that "it is not only wrong but [religiously] impermissible to call Prophets charismatic personalities or to try to explain the truth of

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<sup>630</sup> It is now well known in academia that Weber's treatment of Islam is based upon a number of scattered references. For instance, Weber's heavy emphasis on a Bedouin "warrior class" for his perception of Islam as 'warrior religion' is critically reassessed by Brian Turner. For Turner, Weber's unbalanced approach leads him to "imply either that all Muslims were opportunists or that Muhammad was prepared to accept a redefinition of the core of religion in militaristic terms." See, comparably, Weber, *The Sociology of Religion*, 51-52, 87-88, and Brian Turner, *Weber and Islam: A Critical Study*, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974), 34-36.

<sup>631</sup> Sarıtoprak notes that this stance of Gülen upsets some Sufi authorities. Sarıtoprak, "Fethullah Gülen: A Sufi in His Own Way," 167.

<sup>632</sup> Weber, *The Sociology of Religion*, 45-59.

prophethood with charisma.”<sup>633</sup> To him, this is impermissible because charismatic personalities lack the relationship with God, the important dimension of prophethood.

### *Saintly Leadership*

In spite of this rejection of charismatic authority, as Catherine Eustis notes, Gülen is “esteemed by many as [a] charismatic spiritual intellectual.”<sup>634</sup> In particular, the presentation of the *Emerald Hills of the Heart* represents his followers’ perception of Gülen as a “true leader who leads by example, lives as he preaches and presents an ideal living model to emulate.”<sup>635</sup> However, as noted above, this leadership is perceived neither in terms adequately explained by the Weberian charismatic authority model nor by the model of a Sufi Shaykh’s charisma described by Gilson. Then, what is Gülen’s charisma or leadership popularly understood in relation to his followers? Gülen’s view of sainthood (*walaya*) provides a direct clue to understand his charismatic leadership within the framework of Islam.

In his explanation of Sufi terminology, Gülen describes *wali* as a saint who “is considered as having been favored with ‘self-annihilation in God’ and ‘subsistence with Him,’” and “is enlightened by following the Prophet, by becoming like him a polished

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<sup>633</sup> Gülen, “Karizma,” in tr.fgulen.com.

<sup>634</sup> Catherine Eustis, “‘The Cry of the Nightingale’ Fethullah Gülen – a Modern-Day Rumi?,” paper presented at the conference, *Islam in the Contemporary World: The Fethullah Gülen Movement in Thought and Practice* (Southern Methodist University, Dallas, 2006). Available online at en.fgulen.com.

<sup>635</sup> Gülen, *Emerald Hills of the Heart 1*, xi.

mirror in which the Divine light is reflected.”<sup>636</sup> Such a saint is a noble and blessed one who can be “an object or recipient of some special favors of God.”<sup>637</sup> Having noted that these favors appear as working of wonders, Gülen distinguishes between two types of wonders. One is observable wonder by people like “mind-reading, giving information about things that are hidden or invisible, and crossing great distances or achieving many things in a relatively short time.”<sup>638</sup> In contrast to this, the other type of wonder is invisible comprised of qualities such as “comprehension of the spirit of religion,” “attainment of good morals,” “strict observance of both the rights of God and the rights of the creatures,” “certainty in knowledge of God,” and “reaching the degree of acting as if seeing God when worshipping God in daily life.”<sup>639</sup> To Gülen, this second wonder of Divine favors is the greatest value of the things, “which the common people cannot see and therefore attach no value to.”<sup>640</sup>

Thus, in his discussion of sainthood, Gülen certainly acknowledges Divinely-endowed supernatural power of a saint in a way reminiscent of the Weberian charisma. But, unlike Weber, Gülen affirms that this power is not the condition of sainthood to the extent that it cannot be considered the source of sainthood. Instead, he stresses the invisible qualities of sainthood as the one that “the distinguished servants of God should

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<sup>636</sup> Gülen, *Emerald Hills of the Heart* 2, 60.

<sup>637</sup> Ibid.

<sup>638</sup> Ibid, 64.

<sup>639</sup> Ibid.

<sup>640</sup> Ibid.

always pursue.”<sup>641</sup> Well coinciding with his idea of ‘sober Sufism,’ the invisible qualities are attainable with an act of spiritual intellect on the knowledge of God (*ma’rifa*), but not through the path of yearning and/or spiritual ecstasy that has a potential danger in cherishing such desires as working miracles and sainthood.<sup>642</sup> Gülen’s life as examined in Chapter 3 implies his intellectual effort toward the invisible qualities. As such, his concept of sainthood is embodied and appears in his thought and life, and this intimates that Gülen’s leadership can be paralleled to that of a Muslim saint. Although Gülen himself would reject to be called a saint as he insists of being an ordinary person, there is notable evidence for this consideration. Serif Mardin’s description of sainthood is first of all relevant. To Mardin, a saint is one whose personality acts as a magnetic pole among people. This personality is sainthood, which is “an attribute of the religious prestige which persons build up in their religious community during their lifetime.”<sup>643</sup> From this perspective, Mardin points out that Said Nursi was considered a Muslim saint. By the same token, Gülen can be counted a saint. This link can be further founded in the tradition of Turkish Sufism - as detailed in Chapter 2 -, which makes it possible to place Gülen’s leadership in the tradition of saintly charisma.

In the history of Turkish Sufism, saintly charisma denotes religious/spiritual authority of isolated and independent individual Sufis, who nonetheless exercised massive spiritual and cultural influence.<sup>644</sup> The mystical thoughts and saintly lives of the

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<sup>641</sup> Ibid.

<sup>642</sup> Ibid, xxv.

<sup>643</sup> Mardin, *Religion and Social change in Modern Turkey*, 183.

<sup>644</sup> See, Köprülü, *Early Mystics in Turkish Literature*, 362.

early great Sufis such as Yasawi, Rumi, Emre and Bektash had continually been remembered, circulated and reproduced among people, empowering religious authority to them and Sufism. Their saintly charisma, instead of dying out with their deaths, became deeper and deeper rooted in public mind, creating a popular code of Sufism and exemplifying the charismatic poles of *awliya* or friends of God. Since this initiation, saintly charisma became a core constituent of Turkish Sufism, and eventually gave birth to tariqas and popular saint cults. Taking great benefit from the charismatic fames of their silsilatic-assigned Sufi saints, tariqas evolved into major social institutions. Meanwhile, the charisma of many great individual Sufi saints, “who even today continue to defy all attempts to place them into known initiatic chains and who, moreover, were probably not even members of any large Sufi trends and movements,”<sup>645</sup> informed many saint cults. Thanks to these two institutions, Sufism became socialized and culturalized. In this process, as a comprehensive entity that entails and animates tariqas and saint cults, saintly charisma continually provided exemplary models and infused a cultural code of social, moral and linguistic thought and behaviors into Turkish popular mind.

Although Gülen does not give a separate and direct note for saintly charisma, a close look at his ideal of Turkish Sufism reflects this account of saintly charisma. In his appropriation of Turkish Sufism, Gülen repeatedly calls such great Sufis as Yasawi, Rumi, Emre and Bediüzzaman great Muslim saints as exemplary models to be followed. This identification of them as saints especially within his broad discussion of collective consciousness can be read in comparison to Weber’s concept of routinization of charisma.

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<sup>645</sup> Karamustafa, “Origins of Anatolian Sufism,” 94.



Weber elaborates the term ‘routinization of charisma’ to denote an evolving process by which original charisma is integrated into the rule of everyday life after the deaths of charismatic individuals.<sup>646</sup> This process involves the desire to transform charisma into a lasting good inescapable channel toward the direction of traditionalism and rationalism. Gülen’s conceptualization of Turkish Sufism based upon individual saints can be interpreted as the routinization of charisma in the process of traditionalism and rationalism. For instance, to Gülen, Turkish Sufism is a consciously embedded tradition prominently through individual Sufi saints. Despite this sort of coincidence, a deeper analysis of Gülen’s idea of Turkish Sufism as a collective consciousness of Turkishness reveals its essential departure from the theory of the routinization of charisma. Contrary to Weber’s exclusive focus on such individual charisma as Jesus and Muhammad, Gülen’s Turkish Sufism assumes the ‘collective work’ of individual saintly charisma. In Gülen’s schema, Turkish Sufism can by no means be conceived as an independent religious institution under the everlasting aura of an individual charisma. It is instead a tradition accumulated by total sum of individual Sufi saints. That is, Turkish Sufism is itself collective manifestation of individual saintly charisma, and Gülen assigns it a collective consciousness or *shakshi manawi*. As such a collective act, Turkish Sufism is a cultural embodiment and inheritance rather or deeper than simple traditionalism. It is from this approach that Gülen appropriates the individual Sufis with a title of great Muslim saints, who have served as a collective root of humanitarian Sufism. Gülen’s life, thought and actions, which center around the humanitarian Sufi spirit, are embodiments

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<sup>646</sup> Weber, “The Routinization of Charisma,” in *Social Change*, eds. Havelly, Eva Etzioni and Etzioni (New York : Basic Book, 1973).

of his perception of Turkish Sufism. In this sense, he can be well placed in the line of the individual Turkish Sufi saints. By making use of Ergene and others' consideration of Gülen as a contemporary Rumi, this account makes it possible to explain Gülen's leadership as saintly charisma.

Simultaneously, this account for saintly charisma makes salient the peculiar Turkish culture as a context, in which Gülen's leadership is exercised. Taking Turkish Islam and Sufism at the core of his discourse, Gülen successfully draws many people's attention and leads his movement to the spirit of the Turkish tradition. This leadership recalls Pierre Bourdieu's concept of charisma. Responding to Weber's view that charisma resides in the person of its author, Bourdieu argues that charisma is a delegated and invested power by people. For Bourdieu, charisma is sanctioned "in the dialectic between the authorizing and authorized language and the dispositions of the group which authorizes it and authorizes itself to use it."<sup>647</sup> Put simply, while, for Weber, the axis of charisma is 'religion,' for Bourdieu, it is 'language' as a "part of 'habitus' – a structuring structured disposition. Gülen's 'language' as appears in his works and summons, which is mostly derived from the Turkish Sufi tradition, appeals to the 'habitus,' i.e., the collective consciousness, of contemporary Turks. As argued in the previous chapters, Gülen's distinctiveness lies prominently in his ability to value and recast the tradition attuned to the needs and problems of contemporary society by using contemporary language. His 'language' evokes the audiences collective consciousness and so leads them to share feelings and thought with him. By means of this language, his personal ability becomes

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<sup>647</sup> Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power*. ed. John B. Thompson. (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1991), 129.

instrumental in letting his followers to sanction him a religious authority and thus charismatic leadership.

This uniqueness represents Gülen's personal qualities, which color his own charisma. In other words, Gülen has his own personal qualities as the sources of his charisma, which markedly differs from the Sufi saints in the tradition. Although Gülen's thought relies heavily on their ideas, this is not a case for his charisma. Certainly, his charisma has an inseparable bond to the tradition of saintly charisma, which acts as a cultural playground of his charisma. For example, Gülen's thought has an intrinsic link to that of Said Nursi, and his activities focus on the actualization of that thought. In this sense, many scholars categorize Gülen as a leader of a neo-Nurcu movement, and to this extent, one may argue that Gülen's charisma is a transformation of Nursi's charisma. This contention is directly related to the Weberian routinization of charisma, which takes three ways of depersonalization, i.e., hereditary charisma, virtuoso charisma and office charisma, all of which refer to a transformation process of original charisma into traditionalism and rationalism. Ernst Troeltsch, who points to Weber's mixture usage of the sect-type/church-type, instead proposes to use the concept of 'denominalization.'<sup>648</sup> Nevertheless, according to both Weber and Troeltsch, Gülen's charisma would be considered under the umbrella of Nursi or the Turkish Islamic tradition. In reality, however, his leadership is not perceived among his followers as such a transformed or denominalized charisma. It is instead considered a genuine charisma, which cannot be triggered and commenced in the absence of required personal qualities regardless of his

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<sup>648</sup> Ernst Troeltsch, *The Social Teaching of the Christian Churches* (New York: Harper and Bros., 1960), Vol. 1, 331-358, and Vol. 2, 691-807.

place in a charismatic tradition. Several aspects from a commonsense standpoint support Gülen's genuine charisma. First, just as the different personalities exist between Gülen and Nursi or other Turkish Sufi saints, Gülen's charisma originates and manifests differently. Second, the context that Gülen's leadership manifests itself is different from those of the saints, and as such his charisma is empowered by and works for its peculiar context. Third, even in the same context in time and place, his leadership is unique, as he shapes and guides his movement toward a quite different direction from even the other neo-Nur movements. These and other similar aspects indicate that Gülen has his own charisma, which originates from his own personal qualities.

### *Personal Qualities*

Gülen's life and thought spotlight his personal qualities. In light of the examinations of the previous chapters, it can be broadly said that Gülen is a person of an *alim*, *arif* and man of action. Without repeating these three qualities, let it suffice to underline them as the means and sources of his charisma, which all together have served as magnetic poles for his followers.

Gülen is popularly considered an *alim*, who distinguishes himself by his intellectual ability to transform Islamic doctrines and traditional Sufi spiritual values to contemporary conditions. As the following sections will examine, this ability enables followers to appropriate Gülen's intellectual discourse to resolves contemporary problems. Specifically, Gülen's focus on Islamic spirituality and humanism-based dialogue appeals widely to the vulnerable mass in the prevailing milieu of materialization,

alienation, social atomization, political dissociation and identity crisis. Many people impressed by his message have contributed to the movement's activities by becoming sympathizers or participants. These people have empowered Gülen a respectful charismatic authority on Islamic discourse. Interestingly, this intellectual quality of Gülen reflects the observation of Gilsenan, a leading theologian of 'Sufism moribund.' While Gilsenan contends that Sufism is in decline, he notes the continuance of some tariqas, in which "they [the followers in tariqas] stressed the intellectual abilities of the founding shaykh rather than his miraculous gifts, his skill in outwitting the ulama in knowledge of Shari'a, not his power to intervene in his followers' lives."<sup>649</sup>

Perhaps more uniquely, Gülen is known as an extra-ordinary talented preacher, who is able to successfully verbalize and contextualize his thought in readily accessible and vernacular terms. Foremost is his unique *sohbet* style, which touches listeners both intellectually and spiritually. Specifically, his *sohbet* conveys effectively his spiritual and mystical experiences by means of his intellectual knowledge. In this sense, Gülen's *sohbet* represents the *arif* dimension of his personality, as he is believed an *arif* or a gnostic whose knowledge comes from mystical inspiration and intuition (*irfan*). Because Gülen's *sohbet* demonstrates *arif*, it assures the psychological and spiritual bond between Gülen and his followers. This spiritual bond is a distinctive characteristic of his charismatic leadership, which authorizes Gülen an original charisma in a way resisting what Weber saw as an inevitable routinization process toward traditional or legal-rational types of legitimation. In a sense, Gülen's spiritual relationship with his followers is

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<sup>649</sup> Gilsenan, *Saint and Sufi in Modern Egypt*. 150.

highly mystical, as it occasions a state of intensive spiritual union. For this reason, in the eyes of outsiders especially those who hold critical stances against Gülen, it seems a blind fellowship identical to that of some tariqas. To them, for instance, the weeping of many audiences in numerous video tapes remains a ridiculous mystery. Yet, from the insiders' perspective, the weeping expresses shared feelings, which strengthens the sense of belonging and companionship of Gülen's saintly leadership.

Gülen's well-known personality of being a man of action plays a cementing role for his charisma. For his followers, Gülen is an active practitioner even more than an inspirational thinker. He is popularly said to exemplify his thought and teachings by his action. Notably, his Sufi-associated lifestyle of asceticism and pietism is in rapport with his idea of Sufism and teachings about training the carnal-self. In addition, as he stresses humility as an essential virtue of Islam and Sufi paths,<sup>650</sup> Gülen's humble manner is remarked as a profound impression of many of his visitors. These representative examples indicate 'pragmatic Sufism' appeared in his life and actions. To this extent, Gülen's life corresponds to a Jamesian model of saintliness. According to William James, the salient features of saintliness are a sense of a personified "Ideal Power," surrender to the benevolence the Power conveys, a sense of liberty and ecstasy, and a system shift toward "emotional excitement" and boldness.<sup>651</sup> The consequences of this saintliness appear as a tendency toward asceticism and self-immolation, abandonment of fear and

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<sup>650</sup> A number of Sufi terms that he explains records humility as a core virtue. See, especially, Gülen, "Tawadu (Humility)," *The Emerald Hills of the Heart 1*, 76-80.

<sup>651</sup> James, *The Varieties*, 220.

anxiety, purity from “worldly pursuits”, and charity or “brotherly love.”<sup>652</sup> Presumably due to this embodied saintliness in his action, Gülen is seen as “an ideal living model to emulate” for the members of his movement. One can see this in Gülen’s view of a *temsil* (literally, representation or representer) as a representer of Islam through his/her own good example.<sup>653</sup>

These three qualities of Gülen’s personality serve as the sources of his charismatic leadership. By means of them, he has been able to mobilize and transform a considerable number of people toward his Islamic worldview. Their impression of him has in turn appeared in their use of the honorific title *hocaefendi*, which crystallizes his saintly charismatic authority.

The discussion of this section suggests that insofar as Gülen’s life/thought and the perception of his followers are concerned, Gülen’s leadership can be considered a saintly charisma instead of ‘charismatic authority’ in the Weberian sense and/or ‘charisma of a shaykh in a tariqa.’ Such a saintly charisma be further explored by Sedgwick’s terminology of “Sufism without Shaykh” in some notable aspects. The Ahmadiyya in Sedgwick’s analysis, although principally following the teachings of the shaykh and his examples, shows four absences as a tariqa: the absence of love of the shaykh for a direct love of the disciples to the Prophet, the absence of disciple’s initiation ceremony (*ahd*) that the shaykh supervises, the absence of the title ‘shaykh’ that is replaced with ‘ustadh,’ and the absence of the term ‘tariqa’ that is substituted with ‘tariq.’

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<sup>652</sup> Ibid, 225.

<sup>653</sup> For Gülen’s view of a *temsil*, see, Gülen, *Kırık Testi* [Broken Jug] (Istanbul: Kaynak, 2003), 186-193.

Sedgwick terms these features of Ahmadi absences “Sufism without Shaykh.”<sup>654</sup> To a certain degree, it reflects Gülen’s relationship with his followers, as he is considered an *alim* and *temsil* who accepts neither the initiation of disciples nor the term *tariqa* for his movement. Regardless of this mere coincidence, the structure of Gülen’s leadership principally resists an attempt to evaluate it in relation to even this innovation. Compared to the Ahmadiyya that still stresses the intimate relationship between ‘ustadh’ and disciple even in day-to-day matters like marriages, Gülen does not, or more correctly cannot, counsel everyday affairs of an individual member. Save some members who closely live with him, it is not possible for Gülen to give person-to-person guidance to each member of about six million, no matter how fervently a member wishes. In this sense, he states in a news paper interview that “I do not know the vast majority of these people [of the Gülen movement]. It is essential for a master to know his disciples in *tariqas* and for a leader of a community to know his followers. As for me, I do not know the vast majority of people, who do national *hizmet* on a way to develop education, dialogue and tolerance.”<sup>655</sup> Apparently, the lack of such a personal-based intimate relationship between him and his followers is an indication of the non-*tariqa* association of his leadership. More precisely, Gülen’s charismatic authority addresses to his movement, which already goes far beyond a sociological categorization of a sect or a *tariqa*.

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<sup>654</sup> Sedgwick, *The Heirs of Ahmad Ibn Idris*, 57-59.

<sup>655</sup> Pope, “Interview with Gülen.”



## 5.2. The identity of the movement

The Gülen movement that has continued to grow around Gülen's saintly leadership has caused scholars to struggle to characterize its identity. From the diverse academic angles, a wide variety of classifications of the movement has been proposed. However, a close look at the existing studies makes it noticeable that the classifications mostly originate from the examinations of external and thus observable forms of the movement such as its organizational structure and relations with social variables. A handful of studies look into the internal, i.e., theological motive of the movement. Interestingly, most scholars agree upon Gülen's Sufi orientation, however, the Sufi elements as constituents of the movement have been not detailed yet. For instance, Mercia Hermansen notes the importance of an examination on symbols of what binds members together in the movement in order to figure out its identity. She suggests that "the sources of these models are primarily Islamic, Sufi, and Turkish traditions."<sup>656</sup> In this currency, this section will try to identify the Gülen movement from the standpoint of Sufism especially allowing Gülen's own ideological preparation for the identity of his movement.

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<sup>656</sup> Hermansen, "Understandings of 'Community' within the Gülen Movement."

*Is the Gülen movement a tariqa?*

Intrinsically related to the Sufi orientation of Gülen's life, thought and leadership, the question of whether the Gülen movement is a tariqa was and still is at the center of the concerned scholarship. Primarily, the socio-political context of anti-tariqa and the secularist concern about 'Islamic state' have continually renewed this issue. According to the rationale of such critics as Faik Bulut, Emin Değer and Ahmet Insel, Gülen is a Sufi shaykh, because he is one of the most faithful successors of Said Nursi who was a Nakshi shaykh. Therefore, the movement of *fethullacilar* headed by Gülen is a modern-day tariqa, an offshoot of the Naqshbandis.<sup>657</sup> They specifically find supportive evidence in the organizational structure of the Gülen movement; the centralized leadership and inspection mechanism, the hierarchical line of command, the collective coherence of the members, and the infrastructure of *tekke-madrasa*-military academy system.<sup>658</sup> Just like a tariqa, all activities of the movement are planned and performed centering on the person of the leader, Gülen, for instance, who only has to say 'open schools there' is enough for his followers to put it into practice without asking 'why and how.'<sup>659</sup> According to the critics, the members follow Gülen as if he is a modern-day *Mahdi* or the Redeemer.<sup>660</sup> With such a religious authority, Gülen is said to direct his *fethullacilar* and his sectarian tariqa toward

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<sup>657</sup> See, Bulut, *Kim Bu Fethullah Gülen?*, 31-33; Değer, *Bir Cumhuriyet Düşmanının Portresi*, 9, 56; and, Ahmet Insel, "Altın Nesil, Yeni Muhafazakarlık ve Fethullah Gülen" [The Golden Generation, the New Conservatism and Fethullah Gülen], in *Kim Bu Fethullah Gülen*, ed. Faik Bulut, 170.

<sup>658</sup> Bulut, *Kim Bu Fethullah Gülen?*, 19.

<sup>659</sup> Değer, *Bir Cumhuriyet Düşmanının Portresi*, 59.

<sup>660</sup> Bulut, *Kim Bu Fethullah Gülen?*, 31.

an ultimate aim of the establishment of ‘Islamic state.’ However, the critics go on to argue, since the activities and the aim of the movement are very offensive against the secularist Republic, the movement of *fethullacilar* hides its tariqa identity, performing its mission secretly and patiently, as it moves step-by-step toward a long-term master plan. This is why, to the critics, the Gülen movement strictly maintains the ostensibly secular forms, distancing itself even from using Islamic language including such tariqa terms as ‘*murid, salik and shakirt*’ (all denote ‘disciple’ in tariqas).<sup>661</sup>

On the other hand, many scholars counter claims about the tariqa identity of the Gülen movement. For them, this claim is erroneous with respect to the teachings of Gülen, the reality of the movement and the nature of a tariqa. According to Bekim Agai, the movement lacks essential qualities of traditional tariqas; it holds neither formal/esoteric practices like an initiation rite for a new disciple nor arcane Sufi terminology that marks its membership.<sup>662</sup> Zeki Sarıtoprak also disagrees with the characterization of the movement as a tariqa, pointing out that the movement does not have a shaykh; instead it has secular schools; and the members do not isolate themselves from the society.<sup>663</sup> Concurring with these scholars, Enes Ergene, who views Gülen as a contemporary Sufi, argues that his movement cannot be categorized as a tariqa, as its principle and structure remarkably differ from classical tariqas.<sup>664</sup>

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<sup>661</sup> See, for instance, *ibid*, 113.

<sup>662</sup> Bekim Agai, “The Discursive and Organizational Strategies of the Gülen movement,” paper presented at the conference, *Islam in the Contemporary World: The Fethullah Gülen Movement in Thought and Practice*, (Rice University, 2005). Available online at [en.fgulen.com](http://en.fgulen.com).

<sup>663</sup> Sarıtoprak, “Fethullah Gülen: A Sufi in His Own Way,” 168-169.

<sup>664</sup> Ergene, *Geleneğin Modern Çağa Tanıklığı*, 52-55.

Muhammad Çetin adds that no religious processes or hierarchies are found within the movement. He further argues that unlike the sociological nature of a tariqa, the movement can be considered neither a cult nor a sect. To Çetin, “asking if the Gülen Movement is a sect, means asking if it is enacting a new or deviant form of Islam.”<sup>665</sup> For this argument, he interviews with Abdullah Aymaz, a senior member of the movement, who testifies that the movement is “not a distinct unit within the broader Muslim community by virtue of certain refinements or distinctions of belief or practice. Neither is it a small faction or dissenting clique aggregated around a common interest, peculiar beliefs or unattainable dreams or utopia.”<sup>666</sup> Aymaz goes on to insist that “the movement has no formal leadership, no sheikhs and no hierarchy”; instead it runs by “volunteers work by themselves, thousands of miles away from a specific doctrine or a doctrinal leader”; thus, it is wrong to call the movement a sect. Çetin concludes, for the members of the movement, the movement is neither a sect nor a tariqa.<sup>667</sup> In her interview with several female members of the Gülen movement, Özdalga also contends the non-tariqa identity of the Gülen movement.<sup>668</sup>

While, for the critics, the movement is in the very line of classical tariqas, for the aforementioned scholars, it cannot be classified in such a category. In-between these two

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<sup>665</sup> Muhammed Çetin, “The Gülen Movement: Its Nature and Identity,” paper presented at the conference, *Muslim World in Transition: Contributions of the Gülen Movement*, (University of London, 2007). Available online at en.fgulen.com.

<sup>666</sup> Ibid.

<sup>667</sup> Ibid.

<sup>668</sup> Elisabeth Özdalga, “Following in the Footsteps of Fethullah Gülen,” in *Turkish Islam and the Secular State: The Gülen Movement*, eds. Hakan M. Yavuz, and John L. Esposito (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 2003), 85-114.

paralleling trends stands a third group of scholars, who view the movement as a new form of tariqa. Yavuz identifies the Gülen movement as an expression of a new Sufism that “reutilizes and reinterprets religious values without imposing religion on society.”<sup>669</sup> Erol Gulay represents the advanced voice for this group. He specifically notes the bureaucratic governing structure of the movement’s inner circle, and parallels it to other neo-Sufi tariqa.<sup>670</sup> To Gulay, this form fits into Gilson’s definition of modern tariqas as ‘voluntary associations,’ which run with a voluntary agreement of members on the authority of the established order over them by virtue of a personal act of adherence. From this bond, Gulay classifies the Gülen movement as a neo-Sufi tariqa. Having criticized Yavuz’s focus on the structural features of the movement, Gulay outlines some of Gülen’s neo-Sufic theological foundations of the movement.<sup>671</sup> It seems, however, that like Yavuz, Gulay does not provide a sufficient account for the relationship between Gülen’s theology and the claimed neo-Sufi nature of the movement save by connecting the bureaucratic structure and Gilson’s definition.

Not only Gulay and Yavuz but many other scholars do not provide enough information on how Gülen’s theology especially with respect to his view on Sufism informs the identity of the Gülen movement. However, a close look clarifies Gülen’s elaboration of Sufi worldview regarding the identity of his movement. In particular, his concepts of *hizmet* and *shakhsi manawi* directly involves in the identity of the movement

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<sup>669</sup> “The Gülen Movement: a modern expression of Turkish Islam: Interview with Hakan Yavuz,” *Relioscope*, 21 Jul 2004.

<sup>670</sup> Gulay, “The Gülen Phenomenon: A Neo-Sufi Challenge to Turkey’s Rival Elite?,” 57.

<sup>671</sup> *Ibid*, 54.

to the extent that *shakshi manawi* grants an identity to the movement, which has *hizmet* as its spirit.

*Hizmet (Service for humanity)*

As briefly noted in the discussion of his life in Chapter 3, Gülen initiated his movement as an instrument and living model of *hizmet*, ‘service for humanity.’ As the overarching concept of his thought, *hizmet* denotes an ultimate ideal to be pursued individually and communally. In this sense, Gülen elaborates *hizmet* as the foundational ideology of his movement, as he states “for this movement, religious dimension is important. This religiosity directs not inwardly, [but] more than that, outwardly. [Thus] the concept of *hizmet* is significant.”<sup>672</sup> Accordingly, for Gülen, *hizmet* means the outward reflection of inner personal spirituality. He further clarifies:

[T]he worldly life should be used in order to earn the afterlife and to please the One who has bestowed it. The way to do so is to seek to please Allah and, as an inseparable dimension of it, to serve immediate family members, society, country, and all of humanity accordingly. This service [*hizmet*] is our right, and sharing it with others is our duty.<sup>673</sup>

In Gülen’s schema, this concept of *hizmet* is in concert with his understanding of Sufism.

As a remarkable case, he explains Suffering (*Chila*) of Sufis:

Suffering in this sense becomes, beyond our own spiritual progress, the dedication of our lives to the happiness of others in both worlds and living for others. In other words, we should seek our spiritual progress in the happiness of others. This is the most advisable and the best approved kind of suffering: that is, we die and are revived a few times a day

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<sup>672</sup> Interview with Nuriye Akman, *Zaman*, 9 June 2003.

<sup>673</sup> Ünal and Williams, *Advocate of Dialogue*, 267.

for the guidance and happiness of others, we feel any fire raging in another heart also in our own heart, and we feel the suffering of all people in our spirits. Rather than only being aware of selfish considerations, such as “One who has not suffered does not know what suffering is,” we groan with the afflictions and pains which others in our immediate and distant surroundings endure.<sup>674</sup>

As this passage indicates, for Gülen, the real path of Sufis is to seek their spiritual progress in the happiness of others, which refers directly to *hizmet*. Likewise, his concept of *hizmet* crystallizes his Sufism, which, as examined in the previous chapter, consists of the four core characteristics: Islamic spirituality, Sufism without Sufi orders, Socially engaged Sufism and Dialogic Sufism. These characteristics in turn facilitate a clearer understanding of *hizmet*, as such: *hizmet* is Islamic spirituality as exemplified by the Prophet and his Companions. Yet, for Gülen, it cannot be done through the innumerable ways of *tariqas*, most of which focus on ‘inward-seeking’ (*içe dönük*); rather, it is performed by the way of ‘outward reflection’ (*dışa dönük*) through active engagement in society with constant God-consciousness that deepens and enriches one’s spiritual experience. Gülen is convinced that the best way for God-consciousness is to realize one’s impotence, poverty and nothingness before God; this vertical realization leads one to be humble in his/her horizontal relationship with others and thus enables him/her to love others; and, this love is the humanitarian love, only by which *hizmet* can be truly performed and accomplished.

Specifically, this account for *hizmet* and the humanitarian love corresponds to dialogic Sufism. As underlined earlier, dialogic Sufism in Gülen’s schema is an expression of the reactivation and awakening of the humanitarian love, which the Sufi

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<sup>674</sup> Gülen, *Emerald Hills of the Heart* 2, 235.

saints individually exemplified and collectively instilled as a cultural reality into society. In this sense, dialogic Sufism is a manifestation of *shakshi manawi* or ‘collective spirituality.’

*Shakhsi Manawi (Collective Spirituality)*

In Gülen’s thought, *shakshi manawi*, which can be literally translated to ‘personal spirituality,’ refers to ‘collective spiritual personality.’ This concept clarifies how personal spirituality evolves and transforms into collective personality. Gülen addresses this process in directly relevant passages to a community, depicting what an ideal community for *hizmet* should be. He states:

In our religion, it is important for one to unite with society and live communally. Here, I must clarify that I use the concept of community (*cemaat; jamaat* in Arabic), not as an organization in a sociological sense, but in terms of *shakshi manawi*, which, as a fully religious term, comes into existence by the people who become one or together by sharing the feeling, thought, delight and sadness expressed in the Qur’anic verses and hadiths and greatly signified in our religion.<sup>675</sup>

Gülen characterizes these united people as a group whose Islamic spirituality leads them to be happy ‘for and with’ the happiness of others – like those who, facing others’ deprivations, says ‘I would have rather it happened to me instead of them.’<sup>676</sup> Thus, *shakshi manawi* in essence directs itself toward *hizmet*. In detail, Gülen writes:

Cohesion to *shakhsi manawi* means the unity of an individual with community by melting down him/herself in it... As for community, it is a congregation that occurs by individuals who become together in the same thought and ideal. To be community is

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<sup>675</sup> Gülen, *Kırk Testi*, 201.

<sup>676</sup> Ibid.



gained with the attainment of collective consciousness. Collective consciousness melts an individual down in its structure and brings him/her into one dimension of its numerous dimensions, thus there remains no absolute individual but community. Individual becomes [a part of] community and community becomes, so to speak, one single individual... Worship practiced in this atmosphere flows as a whole to the same pond. If not like this, community's *shaksi manawi* quickly gets high to spiritual steps and peaks... Community gets also high insofar as its essence and nature are preserved. In that manner, sometimes a community represents even *qutbiyyat* [being the axis or pole] and *ghausiyyat* [being the source of help]... When a community elevates to the place of representation of *ghausiyyat* and *qutbiyyat*, the reach of its intercession becomes wide according to that level.<sup>677</sup>

This explanation puts forward three essential components of *shakhsi manawi*. First, Gülen identifies *shakhsi manawi* with collective consciousness, which acts as the bridge between 'personal spirituality' and 'collective personal spirituality.' As an embedded cultural, ideological and behavioral inheritance, collective consciousness prepares individuals naturally to stick together by sharing the same feelings. A community appears as a result of this bond, putting the involved personal spiritualities together for a greater and collective *shakhsi manawi*. As noted in the earlier chapters, the Turkish Sufi tradition represents such *shakhsi manawi*.

In this sense, second, Gülen perceives and further animates a community as a collective person, strikingly stressing 'non-individualities in it any longer.' This may well induce one, like Mercia Hermansen, to find a sense of 'a strong anti-individualistic tendency.' However, Gülen distinguishes *shakhsi manawi* somewhat differently from such anti-individualism. He clarifies 'non-individualities' in the sense that "I prefer His [God's] preferences about me... As the master [Said Nursi] said 'no Said,' in this path that we speak of Divine pleasure, there is no language of selfishness, personal desire and

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<sup>677</sup> Gülen, *Fasildan Fasila 1* [From Time to Time 1] (Izmir: Nil Yayınevi, 1995), 171-172.

greed save only truth (*haqiqa*).”<sup>678</sup> To Gülen, the individual selfishness, the greatest obstacle to a community’s solidarity, not to say of *hizmet*, must be thus trained. In fact, this is the primary aim of his writings of the *Emerald Hills of the Heart*: that is, to present Sufism as the Islamic discipline that centers on the spiritual training of carnal self. In Gülen’s Sufism, the central concepts of *zuhd*, *muraqaba* and *muhasaba* are for such training. ‘Non-selfishness’ rather than ‘anti-individualism’ in a community is further linked to the interdependent relationship of individual spiritualities and collective *shakshi manawi*. A community, insofar as it is a collective person, can be best alive by the team spirit of qualified non-selfish individuals who already internalize such practices as *zuhd*, *muraqaba* and *muhasaba*. In this sense, Ergene states that “just as Sufis become the recipient of specific divine manifestation through their spiritual experiences, *shakshi manawi* of a community is the more compacted and plentiful recipient of such divine manifestations.”<sup>679</sup> Further, as Gülen’s empathetic idea of socially engaged active Sufism indicates, a community of *shakshi manawi* is an essential ground for the enhancement and enrichment of its individuals’ spiritual experience. It shapes and deepens individual spiritualities, for instance, protecting them from individual mistakes in their connection to the outer secular world, and providing them the religious productivity through collective works and sharing deeper the concerned *shakshi manawi*. Put simply, for Gülen, a community and its individual members are interdependent by the means of *shakshi manawi*. A community, which successfully melts its members’ individual spiritualities down for its essence and thus becomes one single collective person, creates synergy that

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<sup>678</sup> Gülen, *Kırk Testi*, 206-207.

<sup>679</sup> Ergene, *Geleneğin Modern Çağa Tanıklığı*.

'1+1 becomes 11, 1+1+1 becomes 111,'<sup>680</sup> and in turn, enhances its members' spiritualities individually.

Third, as noted, Gülen conceptualizes *shakshi manawi* as a spiritual terminology that reflects deep Sufi thought. In particular, in the aforementioned passage, he idealizes the evolution of a community to a representation of *qutbiyyat* (being the axis or pole) and *ghausiyyat* (being the source of help), which "are also drawn from classical Sufi understandings of high exemplars of spirituality, in particular, Ibn Arabi's *Futuhat al-Makkiya*."<sup>681</sup> Thus, Gülen assigns the Sufi concept of *Walaya* (sainthood) to *shakshi manawi*. Above all, he clarifies that "a saint can attain all manifestations. But, even such a saint must unite with society and live in harmony with others."<sup>682</sup> To this extent, Gülen affirms that "If there is *walaya*, it is in *shakshi manawi*, and if there is *qutbiyyat*, it is also in *shakshi manawi*."<sup>683</sup> He sees this representation of *walaya* with *shakshi manawi* as the shortest and surest way. It is "because there is no condition [in *shakshi manawi*] that impels an individual to be pleased with him/herself. The acquired place belongs to *shakshi manawi*. For this reason, it means to protect an individual from all sorts of difficulties that attract him/her with the pride of his/her egoistic self (*nafs*)."<sup>684</sup>

Having identified this representation of *walaya* in *shakshi manawi*, Gülen assigns the roles of saints in the contemporary context in terms of 'annihilation of saints' in

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<sup>680</sup> Gülen, *Fasıldan Fasıla 2*, (Izmir: Nil; 1995), 90.

<sup>681</sup> Hermansen, "Understandings of 'Community' within the Gülen Movement."

<sup>682</sup> Gülen, *Kırık Testi*, 202.

<sup>683</sup> *Ibid*, 204.

<sup>684</sup> Gülen, *Fasıldan Fasıla 1*, 172.

*shakshi manawi*. As underlined earlier, he considers the Turkish humanitarian Sufi tradition as an inherited consciousness proceeded by ‘the collective act of saints.’ In the present day, although some saints continue to do *hizmet* individually, collective consciousness becomes imperative, as Gülen stresses:

All of them and especially “the sage of the age” (Bediüzzaman) never drew attention to themselves when they started service to belief and the Qur’an and they understood this phenomenon as a “collective spiritual body” (*shakhs manevi*) rather than a [particular] personality (*shakhis*), in the sense that after this, service to belief and Islam would be represented by the “[collective] spiritual personality.”<sup>685</sup>

On the basis of this evaluation, Gülen affirms that “there is no *Mujaddid* (renewer) presently. All of them have passed on having completed their mission. Today what is left behind as a duty for us is to recognize them and make sound assessments of their interpretations and perspectives.”<sup>686</sup> In particular, he necessitates the collective act for *hizmet* in the contemporary conditions:

[E]ven though the renewer (*Mujaddid*) had been awaited as a single individual, at a time when the world has become more global and we are experiencing a “shrinking” of distances both in time and space (*taqarub-u zaman* and *taqarub-u makan*), and masses apparently living far apart have become members of the same household, service to humanity (*hizmet*) should be undertaken, not by exceptional individuals (*ferd-i ferdiler*), but rather by the collective [spiritual] body (*shakhs-i manevi*).<sup>687</sup>

To Gülen, *hizmet* for humanity, on the one hand, is actualized by the collective act of people who share the same soul, the same meaning, and the same thought. On the other hand, by means of *shakhsi manawi* as a *qutbiyyat* (being the axis or pole), *hizmet* calls for

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<sup>685</sup> Gülen, “What Should Be the Understanding of ‘Mujaddid’ in Our Time? Does it Refer to a Single Individual Only, or does it Rather Signify a Collective Personality (Shakhs Al-Manawi)?,” in en.fgulen.com.

<sup>686</sup> Ibid.

<sup>687</sup> Ibid.

people of the same ideal to be united; no matter how far they are apart, “just like rivers flowing into the same sea.” Thus, Gülen is convinced that “it does not matter if they had the intention to meet or not, the domains they would like to do services at will unite them, and they will represent this grand truth with a hope-inspiring ‘collective gathering’ (*jamm al-ghafir*).”<sup>688</sup>

These concepts of *hizmet* and *shakshi manawi* directly address what the Gülen movement is. In fact, Gülen’s concept of an ideal community, which performs *hizmet* as its collective goal of *shakshi manawi*, has been a model for the movement, determining its identity, nature, activities and direction. In other words, in Gülen’s theological elaboration, the movement exists with and is run by a group of people who come together with the same feeling and thought, absorb themselves into *shakshi manawi* and actively engage in the common activities for *hizmet*. This ideological definition underlines features of the movement.

Above all, the Gülen movement of *shakshi manawi* resists being categorized into a classical tariqa. It has a “collective spiritual body” (*shakhshi manawi*) instead of a particular shaykh. To this extent, Gülen claims that his movement has no official spiritual authority, rather it has the common spirit of *hizmet*. By the same token, it is not a ‘neo’-tariqa, as the collective consciousness principally presupposes the link to the tradition. In particular, Ergene describes that “the Gülen’s movement is more along the line of Rumi, Yunus, and Yesevi, rather than being a religious order, and it carries a wider social content.”<sup>689</sup> Although the movement is ideologically bonded to the tradition with *shakshi*

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<sup>688</sup> Ibid.

<sup>689</sup> Ergene, “M. Fethullah Gülen and His Movement.”

*manawi*, its form itself is ‘new,’ as Ergene terms ‘a contemporary version of the tradition,’ in which “‘religious feeling’ and ‘social action’ work in great harmony.”<sup>690</sup> Gülen himself underlines this reformulation with a statement that “our faith, our horizons of thought, and our manner... have become, through being formed and reformed in the mold of the collective personality, greatly refined and adorned with universal values.”<sup>691</sup> As such a refined form, the movement also differs from other contemporary Nur movements. While the latter are ‘textual’ communities in Yavuz’s term, the former is an action-centered movement for its assigned *hizmet*.

In Gülen’s idea, *hizmet* for humanity is the single collective goal of the movement. *Hizmet* is the service, which can be best, if not only, done by people who voluntarily respond to the calling for humanity by their own will, “train themselves in the direction of being with no expectation in return (*hasbi*) and altruism” and put this altruism into practice actively.<sup>692</sup> Perceiving in this way, Gülen even resists calling his movement a community. To him, a community is a group of people who unintentionally come together in the same direction like a group of Muslims who gather in a same mosque to perform a congregational *juma* prayer. For this reason, Gülen insists that “I avert from the title of community for our line of *hizmet*.”<sup>693</sup> Instead, he prefers to call it as a movement, underlying the voluntarily membership of his movement for *hizmet*. Literally speaking, while a community derives from ‘communal gathering,’ a movement presupposes

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<sup>690</sup> Ibid.

<sup>691</sup> Gülen, *Toward a Global Civilization of Love and Tolerance*, 154-155.

<sup>692</sup> Gülen, “What Should Be the Understanding of ‘Mujaddid’ in Our Time?.”

<sup>693</sup> Pope, “Interview with Gülen.”

‘activity’ toward a certain direction. Thus, Gülen finds “movement” as the most appropriate term for his movement.

More specifically, Gülen calls his movement “a movement whose examples are from itself” (*Örnekleri Kendinden Bir Hareket*).<sup>694</sup> This name indicates its uniqueness, resisting to be defined and located in the framework of sociological structures. In fact, it is not easy to define such a movement, which has religious doctrines and guidelines at its core, but performs secular educational activities; and, which maintains its traditional and national values as a “revival (*ihya*) movement,” while it has successfully extended its transnational activities over the world. One of the keys for this riddle may be found in Gülen’s theology, which considers *hizmet* for humanity a comprehensive and single ideal that includes and instrumentalizes everything even *shakshi manawi*. Other keys would be well found in an examination on how specifically and practically Gülen’s ideology appears in the Gülen movement.

### 5.3. The membership of the movement

One of the main difficulties in approaching the nature of the Gülen movement is the lack of sufficient socio-demographic data especially regarding its members. Perhaps, the lack of such data is primarily due to the political oppression of the movement. Its free membership and mobility may also be one of the main reasons. In spite of this difficulty in calculating the exact numeric features, scholarly findings and their interview materials

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<sup>694</sup> Gülen, *Örnekleri Kendinden Bir Hareket* [A Movement Originating Its Own Models] (Istanbul: Nil: 2004).

with the members help to figure out the intrinsic relationship between Gülen's Sufism and the movement.

### *Affiliation process*

According to the existing interview materials, the members of the Gülen movement have diverse socioeconomic backgrounds. Before their affiliation to the movement, they were students, businessmen, small entrepreneurs, housewives, farmers, and so on. The age range at the time of their affiliation is also very wide, and is their educational background as well. In terms of religious tendencies, the members were both conservative and liberal Muslims.

Despite this diversity, it is a peculiar feature that a considerable number of the members, prior to their affiliation, familiarized themselves with Gülen's ideas while high school and college students. This indicates that the members overall were educated and literate. The statement of Abdullah Aymaz, a senior member, that "all the people in the Movement are highly educated, mostly either graduates or post-graduates,"<sup>695</sup> though exaggerated in a sense, points to the educational quality of the members. In fact, the vast majority of the first members of the movement were students who joined the movement through the first camp activities and who later became core members of the movement.

The peculiarity of the members' educational background suggests that most of them were, albeit different in degree, prone to intellectual and spiritual satisfaction or

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<sup>695</sup> Cited from Çetin, "The Gülen Movement: Its Nature and Identity."



resolution prior to their encounter to the movement. The three interviewees in Özdalga's study illustrate this aspect: a member is said to have looked into many different groups whose views and political preferences did not satisfy her religious searching, while another had trouble with ideas critical of Islam; and the other had been actively searching for one with whom she could share her concerns about some higher values in life.<sup>696</sup> Presumably, other than this sort of active searching, there might be different precursors of the recruitments such as 'material needs and/or benefits' Nevertheless, the individuals' intellectual search corresponds to their social and political context. During the second half of the twentieth century, Turkey experienced remarkable political, economic and social change oscillating between the secular regime and the Turkish religious identity. It followed consequent conflicts like the controversies around Imam Hatip school (Turkish: *İmam Hatip Lisesi*)<sup>697</sup> and veiling (*hijab*). This milieu must have caused religious instability and directed some or many individuals toward an active search for their religious identity. Along with this social context, the interviewees' testimonies in Özdalga's study reflect a generally accepted psychological theory of adolescence.<sup>698</sup> For

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<sup>696</sup> Özdalga, "Following in the Footsteps of Fethullah Gülen."

<sup>697</sup> For a brief account for Imam Hatip school, see, Bahattin Aksit, "Islamic Education in Turkey: Medrese reform in the Late Ottoman Times and Imam-Hatip Schools in the Republic," *Islam in Modern Turkey*, ed., Richard Tapper (London: Tauris, 1991), 145-170.

<sup>698</sup> The majority of the psychological research on conversion age show that conversion – including both religious experience in one religious tradition and conversion experience to other religion(s) - is most likely to occur in adolescence, even though it may occur at any age. From early studies (i.e., Starbuck, 1911; Coe, 1917; Hall, 1920. etc) to current researches (i.e., Johnson, 1959; Roberts, 1965; Gillespie, 1991 etc), it is suggested that religious conversion is an adolescent phenomenon. For instance, Starbuck notes that 'theology takes the adolescent tendencies and builds upon them; it seems that the essential thing in adolescent growth is to bring the person out of childhood into the new life of mature and personal insight.' See, Edwin Starbuck, *The Psychology of Religion* (London: The Walter Scott, 1911/1899), 224. See, George Coe, *The Psychology of Religion*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press: 1917); Stanley Hall, *Adolescence: Its Psychology and Its Relationship to Physiology, Anthropology, Sociology, Sex, Crime, Religion, and Education* (London: Appleton: 1920), Vol. 1-2; Paul Jonson, *Psychology of Religion* (New

many psychologists, adolescence is a likely time in which the very existence of a variety of religious ideas testifies to the necessity of choice, even if only to affirm one's already existing religious faith.<sup>699</sup> Likewise, the members' intellectual ability can be considered an important, if not determinant, factor in their recruitment and further the nature of their membership of the movement.

The first contacts of the members to Gülen's ideas occur through various channels. By the first contact, I mean not a simple encounter by chance, but a trigger to lead the individuals to join the movement. One of Özdalga's interviewees testifies that Gülen's books were the first medium between her and his ideas, as she states that "when I started to read his books, I did not know about any *cemaat* [community] connected to his person. I did not know about his videocassettes at that time, for example, I was very young then, and I think that his community was not that well known at that time."<sup>700</sup> For another interviewee, it was Gülen's Friday sermons (*vaaz*) that greatly impressed her amidst her active searching.<sup>701</sup> In addition to these channels, Hermansen suggests that "members encounter the movement through contexts such as secondary or university educational settings or perhaps through contacts in their personal circle of relatives and acquaintances."<sup>702</sup> Caki Fahri further details the four patterns of the Nurcu recruitment

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York: Abingdon Press: 1959); F. J. Roberts, "Some Psychological Factors in Religious Conversion," *British Journal of Social and Religious Psychology* 4 (1965), 185-187; Bailey Gillespie, *The Dynamics of Religious Conversion* (Alabama: Religious Education Press: 1991).

<sup>699</sup> As a representative study, see, Peter Berger, *The Heretical Imperative: Contemporary Possibilities of Religious Affirmation* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday: 1979).

<sup>700</sup> Özdalga, "Following in the Footsteps of Fethullah Gülen." 101.

<sup>701</sup> Ibid, 91.

<sup>702</sup> Hermansen, "Understandings of "Community" within the Gülen Movement."

including that of the Gülen movement: through elite Nurcu schools, through *dershanes* established around public high schools, through local ties, and through family ties.<sup>703</sup> According to the study of Helen Ebaugh and Dogan Koc, business trips also play a motivational role in some members' recruitment.<sup>704</sup>

### *Affiliation motifs*

After their first contacts, some individuals go through the decision process to be a member. The factors involved in the decision can be varied depending on the personal backgrounds and the first contacts. Broadly, the scholars at issue speak about two paralleling motifs. Representatively, Fahri considers extrinsic factors as primary motifs. On the basis of his interviewees' testimonies, he argues that "material benefits rather than ideological orientation play a more important role for involvement in the Nurju movement."<sup>705</sup> Setting aside his unjustified identification of the Gülen movement with the other Nurcu movements, which does not correspond to many scholars' differentiation and distinction of the Gülen movement from them, it is interesting to note that his interview materials, which are used for other arguments, clearly show the involved intrinsic factors. For instance, an interviewee states that "I realized that none of the things

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<sup>703</sup> Caki Fahri, *New Social Classes and Movements in the Context of Politico-economic Development in Contemporary Turkey*, Ph.D. diss. (Temple University, 2001).

<sup>704</sup> Helen Ebaugh and Dogan Koc, "Funding Gülen-inspired Good Works: Demonstrating and Generating Commitment to the Movement," paper presented at the conference, *Muslim World in Transition: Contributions of the Gülen Movement*, (University of London, 2007). Available online at en.fgulen.com.

<sup>705</sup> Fahri, *New Social Classes and Movements*, 247.

I heard about them [Nurcus] was true... I liked the Risalei Nur very much because it was somewhat different than religious ideas we used to hear. It was very rational and persuasive.”<sup>706</sup> This interviewee is talking about the intrinsic ‘intellectual factor’ rather than an extrinsic ‘material benefit.’ Likewise, several other interviews that Fahri includes in his study barely support his argument. Nevertheless, he further attributes the recruitment through local and family ties in a sense of forced and pressured affiliation of the members by family or in order to secure a job.<sup>707</sup>

The extrinsic motif is arguable both in theoretical and empirical senses. Hypothetically, the claimed material benefits at their best can be applicable to the members that joined after the Gülen movement grew enough to satisfy their material needs. Certainly, the material benefits were not the motivational factor for the first generation of the movement, who, far from the materially gaining, continually exposed themselves to a train of persecutions. Not only the first generation but also members who joined prior to, at least, 1986 when the movement began to flourish, seem to have hardly made considerable material fortune. Moreover, *hizmet*, the founding ideology of the movement, makes its sub-organizations not for the members’ material wealth but for spiritual wealth together with other people. Ahmet Kuru notes that “Gülen is against the kind of rationalism that focuses on egoistic self interest and pure materialistic cost-benefit analysis.”<sup>708</sup> Serif Tekalan further observes that the members who have been appointed as

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<sup>706</sup> Ibid, 254.

<sup>707</sup> Ibid, 245.

<sup>708</sup> Ahmet Kuru, “Fethullah Gülen’s Search for a Middle Way Between Modernity and Muslim Tradition,” in *Turkish Islam and the Secular State: The Gülen Movement*, eds. Hakan M. Yavuz, and John L. Esposito (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 2003), 123.

a manager through a social contract “are not allowed to utilize the institutions for their own benefits.”<sup>709</sup> Well presumably, if to be materially wealthy is the primary motivation of the membership, it would be hard for one to have observed the success of such a faith-based movement.

As a matter of fact, the interview materials of the studies of Özdalga and Helen Ebaugh and Dogan Koc reveal more-intrinsic reasons rather than the extrinsic motif. An Özdalga’s subject stresses how deeply Gülen’s humanitarian worldview impressed her to join the movement. The interviewee further clarifies that “when they [her friends] go to places like Russia, for example, the circumstances may be such that it is not even appropriate for them to carry out with their own prayers. They even have to sacrifice this part of their own lives when they go to such places. This is also the desire of *hocaefendi*, that we should spread the message of love to other people.”<sup>710</sup> This testimony not only resists the extrinsic motif, but more significantly indicates the deep involvement of core virtues of Gülen’s ideas in the recruitment process of the members. In this sense, Özdalga concludes that “regarding love, pietism, humility, self-criticism, professional (not political) activism, they all have studied their Gülen catechism very thoroughly. But at the same time, this urge to follow in Gülen’s footsteps answers a voice within themselves that genuinely is their own and that has not been forced on them through communal pressure.”<sup>711</sup>

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<sup>709</sup> Serif Tekalan, “A Movement of Volunteers.” paper presented at the conference, *Islam in the Contemporary World: The Fethullah Gülen Movement in Thought and Practice* (Rice University, 2005).

<sup>710</sup> Özdalga, “Following in the Footsteps of Fethullah Gülen.” 94.

<sup>711</sup> *Ibid*, 114.

Many scholars concur with Özdalga's conclusion, considering core virtues of Gülen's ideas as the primary subjects of the members' intellectual reflection, which further trigger them to join the movement. In particular, Ergene enumerates such virtues as "modesty, self-sacrifice, altruism, a spirit of devotion, being with the Lord although among people, living for the good of others, being of service without expectations, and depth of the spirit and heart with no anticipation for reward for any intention or deed."<sup>712</sup> In a way of confirming what I demonstrated in the previous chapters, Ergene underlines that all of these virtues are in Sufi culture and are the main constituents of the intellectual and active dynamics of the Gülen movement. These Sufi qualities constantly appear in the members' testimonies as the primary motivational topics to be reflected 'before, in and after' their recruitment process.

As Gülen ideologizes 'Sufism without tariqa,' the process to become a member of the movement markedly differs from that of tariqas. Agai observes that "unlike the Sufi brotherhoods, the *cemaat* has neither the requiry of formal membership nor a rite of initiation nor does it need any specific room to convene."<sup>713</sup> To him, "becoming a member is a process rather than a specific single act and the *cemaat* evolves wherever its members come together."<sup>714</sup> One of the implications of this description is that the personal decision to be a member itself does not carry a significant symbolic meaning in communal sense. It is instead a process from being a sympathizer and a simple

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<sup>712</sup> Ergene, "M. Fethullah Gülen and His Movement."

<sup>713</sup> Agai, "Discursive and Organizational Strategies of the Gülen Movement." For a representative voice of the members' perception on this issue, see, Ali Bulaç, "Tarikat ve Cemaat," Zaman, 22 July 2000.

<sup>714</sup> Ibid.

participant toward being an active and committed member. Every step in this process completely depends on one's own will, which in turn confirms free, voluntarily and mobile membership. In this sense, a member notes that "this is a movement of the heart, we are not a recruitment organization."<sup>715</sup> As such a movement of the heart, the only condition to be a member is the voluntary acceptance, sharing of the same values with other members and self-preparation to do *hizmet*.

Becoming a member thus essentially means to share the principles and goals of the movement as forwarded by Gülen's schema. In order to share, further studies are necessary. Accordingly, an immediate consequence of being a member is deeper study on Gülen's ideas with gradual involvement in the activities of the movement. Notably, it is observed that the members arrange the study program by their own will in their group studies. An interviewee in Özdalga's study reports that "[in our group studies] no one among us would play the role of leader or hoca [teacher]... there is no rule that we have to follow."<sup>716</sup> In clarifying this 'autonomic group readings,' the interviewee stresses that the study is not like that of *tariqa*, as "our time is not a time for *tarikats*, but for communities: that is to say, a time for simple gathering."<sup>717</sup> This testimony reveals two important aspects. First, as Özdalga remarks, "every person is his/her own master" in the Gülen movement.<sup>718</sup> Second, as Yavuz declares in his interview talk, the members of the Gülen movement "are not members of any Sufi group, because they believe that the age

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<sup>715</sup> Hermansen, "Understandings of 'Community' within the Gülen Movement."

<sup>716</sup> Özdalga, "Following in the Footsteps of Fethullah Gülen," 92.

<sup>717</sup> Ibid.

<sup>718</sup> Ibid.

of Sufi *tarikat* [Sufi brotherhood] is past.”<sup>719</sup> Another interviewed report also points to other aspects of the recruitment process. The report includes a note that “at first, I did not understand why he [Gülen] was weeping... it was not fake, but where did all this suffering exposed come from? But then, by listening over and over again, I started to understand his message better... After that, after I had understood why he was weeping, I started to weep myself as well.”<sup>720</sup> This statement, first, connotes that intellectual contemplation precedes and further links to spiritual bond between the concerned members and Gülen, reflecting Gülen’s concept of ‘sober Sufism’ and his own spiritual experience. Second, it implies that his ideas play a significant role in both strengthening the members’ personal fellowship and empowering his charismatic authority. As shown in the interview, this charisma is endowed when one shares his ideas and his ideas make one to share with them. In this sense, Gülen’s charisma is genuinely respected by the members to the extent that it bears resemblance with saintly charisma. Third, along with the active searching and the voluntarily-autonomic study, the member’s weeping indicates that to be a member does not mean to be a blind follower of Gülen, as the weeping comes naturally.

As important in Gülen’s life and thought, the individuals are also observed to have begun to do Sufi spiritual practices with their membership. A member underlines that “first of all, you become a slave [*kul*], that is, you start to criticize yourself... of

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<sup>719</sup> “The Gülen Movement: a modern expression of Turkish Islam: Interview with Hakan Yavuz,” *Religioscope*.

<sup>720</sup> Özdalga, “Following in the Footsteps of Fethullah Gülen.” 101.



course: reserve, humility, getting away from being egocentric.”<sup>721</sup> This saying directly refers to the self-reflection, that is, *muhasaba* and *muraqaba* in Gülen’s Sufism, as the interviewee further clarifies that “this [selfishness through self-criticism] is at the very foundation of religion, and Hocaefendi represents a very good example for us in this respect.”<sup>722</sup> In fact, Gülen teaches *muraqaba* as “one of the most important and direct ways of reaching God without a guide,” which proceeds from the feeling of God’s constant supervision to “avoid whatever is other than Him.”<sup>723</sup> In this sense, ‘a good example’ denotes a *temsil*, a representer of Islam by word and action, in which case, as discussed earlier, Gülen’s saintly charisma is perceived among members.

To secure and promote autonomic group studies and Sufi-associated training, the movement has developed its peculiar methods such as reading circles and weekly *sobhets* in *dershanes*, which will be detailed in the following sections. Owing to these methods for self exploration both intellectually and spiritually, the members step forward to become “fully aware of what they are doing and why they are doing it” with “a clear definition of the services, the field of the action, the goals and the instruments used to achieve them.”<sup>724</sup> In the process, they eventually learn, begin to use and get familiar with common terminology of the movement. The aforementioned interviewee’s usage of self-criticism is a representative example of this aspect. The interviewee is also observed to have frequently used the concept of ‘love,’ in Özdalga’s description, “following in the

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<sup>721</sup> Ibid, 95.

<sup>722</sup> Ibid.

<sup>723</sup> Gülen, *Emerald Hills of the Heart 1*, 58.

<sup>724</sup> Çetin, “The Gülen Movement: Its Nature and Identity.”

footsteps of Fethullah Gülen.” Similarly, as readily notable in various interview materials, ‘love’ and ‘tolerance’ in the members’ vocabulary denote specifically the two core concepts of Gülen’s humanitarianism, rather than in common or broad sense. Thus, these and other specified terms carry symbolic meaning among the members and serve as a major means of strengthening the mutual and horizontal bond. In a sense, this sharing language activates “symbolic power” in Bourdieu’s term. As mentioned in the earlier section, Bourdieu sees language as an evoking factor of habitus, and in such a way Gülen instrumentalizes his language. From this similarity, some researchers on the movement remark the members’ sharing language with Gülen. Selcuk Uygur makes use of Hennis’s theory of habitus as “the non-discursive aspects of culture that bind individuals to larger groups,”<sup>725</sup> while Etga Ugur notes Smidt’s contention that “religion also provides a symbolic language enmeshed in the grammar of the society by speaking the language of the masses and utilizing the ‘cultural capital.’”<sup>726</sup> Gülen’s language, which, as I argued in the earlier discussion, evokes the audiences ‘habitus,’ i.e., collective consciousness of their cultural inheritance, appears and is dynamically reproduced in the members’ testimonies. Empathetically, this symbolic language of habitus denotes *shakshi manawi* in Gülen’s own ideas. And, *shakshi manawi* refers essentially to the accumulated cultural collectivity of the Turkish Sufi tradition to which Gülen’s love/tolerance-based humanitarian worldview is intrinsically bound. As Ergene stresses, *shakshi manawi* is the

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<sup>725</sup> Selcuk Uygur, “‘Islamic Puritanism’ as a Source of Economic Development: Contributions of the Gülen Movement,” paper presented at the conference, *Muslim World in Transition: Contributions of the Gülen Movement* (University of London, 2007). Available online at en.fgulen.com.

<sup>726</sup> Etga Ugur, “Religion as a Source of Social Capital? The Gülen Movement in the Public Sphere,” paper presented at the conference, *Muslim World in Transition: Contributions of the Gülen Movement*, (University of London, 2007). Available online at en.fgulen.com.

concept that encompasses a depth and width of almost all of traditional Sufi terminology in the formation of a community.

As discussed earlier, Gülen identifies his movement as a collective person of *shakshi manawi*, which consists of individuals who strive for being ‘non-selfish’ and ‘melt-down’ in and by it. The ‘non-selfishness’ is attained by constant and conscious training of one’s carnal ego through such Sufi-oriented practices of *zuhd*, *muraqaba* and *muhasaba*, and the movement facilitates this individual spiritual growth, as it awakens one in *shakshi manawi* and enables him/her to annihilate in *shakshi manawi*. As a reflection of this cooperative relationship, it is observed in some interviews that ‘becoming a member’ means nothing else than ‘becoming a part’ of the movement. Özdalga takes a note on an interviewee’s stressed expression of “becoming a part” in a way of refusing to be called a member.<sup>727</sup> For the interviewee, who testifies the aforementioned autonomic readings and spiritual training of self-criticism, “becoming a part” does not mean to become a mechanical part of the movement, instead to be an organic participant of *hizmet*. In a similar sense, Özdalga interprets that “becoming part of the Gülen community, therefore, does not mean that individuals are turned into passive tools in the hands of an authoritarian leadership. The Gülen ideology is strongly conservative, it is true, but that is not the same as saying that the principles of its organization are authoritarian or by any means totalitarian.”<sup>728</sup> A senior member supports this interpretation in his assertion that “the multiple, mutable, and overlapping relations of belonging to service projects form the basis, solidarity, cohesion and continuity of the

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<sup>727</sup> Özdalga, “Following in the Footsteps of Fethullah Gülen,” 95.

<sup>728</sup> Ibid, 114.

Gülen Movement. In these network relations, belongings, individual needs and collective goals, and individual and collective interests, are constantly negotiated and served. Individuality and collectivity are not mutually exclusive, they are one and the same thing.”<sup>729</sup>

Just as Gülen’s ‘language’ of *shakshi manawi* is perceived and shared in this way and it is undetachably connected to his idea of active-based sociality, many members further become active participants in the activities of the movement. Having noted a considerable number of active members, some scholars underline the meaning of participation. For instance, Hermansen signifies direct participation of the members as a motivational factor for “highly symbolic, cultural, ethical and spiritual values rather than worldly goods or material gains.”<sup>730</sup> She further insists that “there is a sense of mission and an aura of excitement at being involved in a successful and meaningful project which as it grows, expands the horizons of individuals, what they can accomplish as part of a greater entity, and the boundaries to which their efforts can reach.”<sup>731</sup> In a similar sense, other scholars describe the members as ‘active ascetics’ in the Weberian sense, taking notice of how the ideological goal of *hizmet* draws out the members’ active participation. For instance, from her interview materials, Özdalga emphasizes that “the *hizmet* owing to other human beings is endless. This is the consequence of the concept of love espoused and practiced by Zeynep [an interviewed member] and those like her.”<sup>732</sup> Noteworthy,

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<sup>729</sup> Ebaugh and Koc, “Funding Gülen-inspired Good Works.”

<sup>730</sup> Hermansen, “Understandings of “Community” within the Gülen Movement.”

<sup>731</sup> Ibid.

<sup>732</sup> Özdalga, “Following in the Footsteps of Fethullah Gülen.” 94.

scholars like Ergene and Michel propose the involved Sufi elements in the members' social relationship. While Ergene considers such Sufi virtues as modesty, self-sacrifice, altruism and a spirit of devotion to be the rational and social dynamic of the Gülen movement,<sup>733</sup> Michel suggests that Sufism leads the members the way to *shawq*, delight, on which an individual can be conducive to a joyful, loving acceptance of life rather than be forced to carry onerous and unpleasant burden.<sup>734</sup>

In fact, as Gülen's theology of *hizmet* necessitates one to internalize and actualize Sufi concepts of love and altruism while 'living among people,' it may not be hard to imagine the involved Sufi elements in the recruitment, membership and further *hizmet*-centered life of the members. In other words, as an Özdalga's interviewee implies, becoming a member of the Gülen movement means to become like Rumi, whose one foot in his own faith tradition while the other roams freely to and for the others. As manifested in Rumi's thought and life, the two worlds are interconnected by the Sufi elements of love, tolerance and humanism. Compared to 'sleep peacefully' (Catholicism) and 'eat well' (Calvinism) qualities in Weber's concept of 'inner affinity,' the 'ascetic pietism,' which directs to Gülen's core teaching of 'is there any more' (*daha yok mu*), provides such an inner affinity for the interconnection. In this sense, Sufism of *shakshi manawi* can be called the 'spirit' (again, in Weber's term) of the Gülen movement.

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<sup>733</sup> Ergene, "M. Fethullah Gülen and His Movement."

<sup>734</sup> Michel, "Sufism and Modernity in the Thought of Fethullah Gülen."

#### 5.4. The organizational structure of the movement

The movement began with Gülen's activation of his educational project through the camp activities with young students in the 1960's. Since then, it has evolved into a form suitable to realize Gülen's ideal of *hizmet* through *shakshi manawi*. Toward both individual and communal salvation in tune with socio-political circumstances, the form has been designed to evoke and awaken individuals' *shakshi manawi* with other like-minded and similarly intentioned people, binding them together with and directing them toward the communal goal of *hizmet* for humanity.

The most prominent debate in organizational studies of the movement is if the movement operates with a hierarchical structure. Aras contends that "the organizational structure of the movement is seen as hierarchical and somewhat non-democratic, which is somewhat unexpected given the community's liberal attitudes and tolerance of differences."<sup>735</sup> Concurring with this view, Gulay further parallels the movement with other neo-Sufi tariqas, insisting that it is run by the bureaucratic governing structure of an inner circle, whose "status is determined by devotion to the leader and to the Qur'an and the hadith."<sup>736</sup> Fahri includes the movement into the hierarchically-operated Nurcu movements,<sup>737</sup> while Yavuz identifies it with the neo-Nur movement that maintains a

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<sup>735</sup> Bulent Aras and Omer Caha, "Fethullah Gülen and his liberal 'Turkish Islam' movement," *Middle East Review of International Affairs Journal online* 4 (2000) 30-42.

<sup>736</sup> Gulay, "The Gülen Phenomenon: A Neo-Sufi Challenge to Turkey's Rival Elite?," 57.

<sup>737</sup> Fahri, *New Social Classes and Movements*, 112-123.

hierarchical system.<sup>738</sup> Another group of scholars reject this claim, echoing Saritoprak's contention that the movement is different from the Sufi orders, particularly in its structure of loose-knit relationships and its lack of a hierarchy.<sup>739</sup>

However, there is a rising demand to approach the issue by making distinction between the movement and its sub-organizations. Actually, Gulay touches on this distinction by using the term 'inner circle,' and Yavuz gives some detailed information on the "informal networks" of the movement. Yet, both do not give a clear account of the distinction between the movement and its sub-organizations, leaving the issue still-confused. Particularly, Hermansen points out that "in fact, the Gülen community is both closely knit and at the same time dispersed. It is both hierarchical and egalitarian," and argues that its organizational structure and style of networking "are not overtly mapped out on organizational charts or lines of command."<sup>740</sup> In these studies and others alike, it is not clear which one - the movement itself or its sub-organizations or both - should be considered for their arguments.

A close look makes it noticeable the common and different aspects that lie between the movement and its sub-organizations. Both are run for the single and ultimate goal of *hizmet*, and in fact, Gülen and his followers call them 'our *hizmet*' (*hizmetimiz*). Nevertheless, both are different in many aspects. In essence, the movement has its sub-organizations as an effective and practical means to attain its goal. It is informal and

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<sup>738</sup> Yavuz, *Islamic Political Identity in Turkey*, 11-12.

<sup>739</sup> Saritoprak, "Fethullah Gülen: A Sufi in His Own Way," 168-169.

<sup>740</sup> Hermansen, "Understandings of "Community" within the Gülen Movement."

unofficial, whose activities are formalized through its official sub-organizations. In reality, thus, they are operated by different organizational and structural systems.

### *The informal movement*

The informality of the movement is preserved in Gülen's consistent assertion that "as a matter of fact, I stood at the pulpits of the mosques, in public places, and at conferences and seminars and stated what needs to be done. I mean to say that this is not organized. These people follow these suggestions. They spread out around the world. They accomplished something in those places and continue to do things."<sup>741</sup> By this statement, however, Gülen does not mean the incorporeity of the movement; instead he insists on an informal and decentralized association.<sup>742</sup> Yavuz frames the informal networks of the movement with three constituent circles of members: at its core, "elder brothers" (*büyük abiler*) who are fulltime activists and work as professionals with salaries from the movement's institutions; at its middle, 'participants' who (in)directly support Gülen's religious-national goals including material contributions and/or voluntary labor; and at its periphery, 'sympathizers,' the biggest group, who share Gülen's goals but do not participate in their realization. Having outlined this network, Yavuz contends that "Gülen community is less cohesive in its periphery but has a military-like discipline at the core."<sup>743</sup> Citing this argument, Gulay suggests that "the community is structured by a

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<sup>741</sup> Nuriye Akman, "High-Ranking People Used the Cassette Incident as a Tool for Blackmail."

<sup>742</sup> See, Gulay, "The Gülen Phenomenon: A Neo-Sufi Challenge to Turkey's Rival Elite?," 42.

<sup>743</sup> Yavuz, *Islamic Political Identity in Turkey*, 189.



bureaucratic arrangement of authority based on a network of loyalty and trust. Power is distributed outwards from a central board of advisors, the *buyuk abiler*, or ‘elder brothers,’ consisting of 30 full-time advisors to Gülen who operate with ‘military-like’ discipline and with the utmost loyalty to Gülen and the community’s ideals.”<sup>744</sup> Aras and Caha also points out the ‘top-down’ hierarchical-pyramid system of command.<sup>745</sup>

This account, however, needs a close examination and re-evaluation in several important aspects, especially as the aforementioned scholars do not provide information about ‘why and how’ the movement is operated by a military-like disciplinary bureaucracy. First of all, as examined in the previous chapter of Gülen’s life, the “elder brothers,” who later were to be the core members, became the members through the first camp activities. That is, they were the first recipients of Gülen’s tripod educational system of *madrassa-tekke*-military academy, which Gülen set up to raise pious youths and action-oriented Muslims who combine rational enlightenment with true spirituality and well-disciplined lifestyle.<sup>746</sup> In this synthetic and organic system, the elder brothers’ ‘military-like’ disciplinary lifestyles resulted from their internalization of Sufi spiritual qualities. Following Gülen’s direct teachings, their lifestyles were constructed by the personal embodiment of the strict observance of asceticism, pietism, self-criticism/evaluation and constant consciousness of God (*yaqaza*), continually interacting with their outward and communal relationship. In this sense, the so-called ‘military-

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<sup>744</sup> Gulay, “The Gülen Phenomenon: A Neo-Sufi Challenge to Turkey’s Rival Elite?,” 42-43.

<sup>745</sup> Aras and Caha, “Fethullah Gülen and his liberal ‘Turkish Islam’ movement.”

<sup>746</sup> See, for instance, “Fethullah Gülen and his Meeting with the Pope,” *The Fountain*, 23 (1998), 16.

discipline' does not denote the 'military-like command system' as alleged. Second, the voluntary and free membership as illustrated earlier does not confirm the blind fellowship characterized by 'the utmost loyalty to' or 'devotion to' Gülen. More relevantly, the fellowship comes from 'respect' (*saygı* in Turkish) with the feeling of sharing the same values. Gülen prioritizes this virtue of respect in teaching a communal life in which "the respect of the younger to the elder and the love of the elder to the younger" are important elements of *shakshi manawi*.<sup>747</sup> In a practical sense, Agai observes that "immediately accessible to persons familiar with Turkish culture is the metaphor of the community as a family. Within *hizmet*, those who are competent to interpret the teachings are accorded the more venerable titles 'older brother' (*abi*) or 'older sister' (*abla*) in the case of females."<sup>748</sup> As such, it is more correct to read 'elder brother' as an unofficial title given through intimate and respectful relationship rather than the authoritative position. Third, as such a title, 'elder brother' is not endowed by any 'top-down' authority, and thus does not have the official decision-making authority. Rather, the primary role of the elder brothers, as the living witness of Gülen's teaching and its reflection in the movement, is to give concerned advice to the members about how to perform *hizmet* effectively from their experiential knowledge. Just as Gülen is considered a spiritual visionary, the elder brothers who have observed him closer than any other are more likely visionary advisors than planners or supervisors of projects. Ugur supports this view by his observation that as "a core cadre of devotees around Fethullah Gülen," they offer "the inspiration and

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<sup>747</sup> Gülen, *Kırık Testi*, 204-205.

<sup>748</sup> Bekim Agai, "The Gülen movement's Islamic ethic of education", in *Turkish Islam and the Secular State: The Gülen Movement*, eds. Hakan M. Yavuz, and John L. Esposito (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 2003), 68.

know-how to others for building schools, opening cultural centers and language courses.”<sup>749</sup> Fourth, in sharp contrast to the rigid-inner mobility indicated by the claimed meaning of “elder brothers,” the researchers like Özdalga, Aslandogan and Çetin remark that “individual upward mobility is always possible for all in the Gülen Movement because entry and exit, commitment and withdrawal are always voluntary and always possible.”<sup>750</sup>

Together with the discussion of membership in the previous section, this consideration focuses on the horizontal relationship of the structure rather than the vertical line superimposed by Yavuz on his classification of the structure in terms of three (horizontal) circles. Therefore, from the perspective of the horizontal relationship, the organization must be reconstructed, and in light of many recent studies, the following three circles may well be accountable. The first circle is a group of ordinary members, including both those who remain as sympathizers in the periphery and who, like young students, are in preparatory trainings. The second group is comprised of those who actively participate in the movement projects. Specifically, these active members are the major human capital for the movement, who devote their labor, time and materials to *hizmet*, as will be examined in detail in the following section. The last circle is full-time administrators, who work as professionals with the payment of the movement. This group includes the core members, ‘elder brothers,’ regional persons in charge (local imams) and specialists in certain areas, who principally serve as agents between the above two groups and the leadership of the movement.

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<sup>749</sup> Ugur, “Religion as a Source of Social Capital?.”

<sup>750</sup> See, Çetin, “The Gülen Movement: Its Nature and Identity.”

In general, the administrators and their roles are respected. Among them, ‘local imams’ deserve a special note, since they are typically considered the most important figures of the hierarchical structure of the movement. The primary duty of local imams is to conduct projects like the establishment of schools and the arrangement of dialogue activities. They are responsible “not only financially but in terms of planning, decision making and accountability.”<sup>751</sup> According to Fahri, these imams are elected by such criteria as “the knowledge of religious (Islamic) texts,” “skills of communication and leadership and possession of a large social network.”<sup>752</sup> Fahri contends that they (the lower imams) seek better positions (the higher imams) in the movement, and considers this as evidence “that there is a vertical mobility in the movement.”<sup>753</sup> Taking this an established fact, he further suggests that “the possibility of rewards in serving to the movement can be interpreted as an encouraging factor, at least, to stay in the movement, if not to join the movement.”<sup>754</sup> Fahri’s contention of this extrinsic reasoning runs counter to many specialists’ common description of the members as ‘the Weberian pietic ascetics.’ Contrary to Fahri’s exclusion of the involvement of ‘inner qualities,’ the scholars as discussed earlier at length suggest the deep involvement of pious, ascetic and work-hard qualities of the imamhood in the election and the promotion. Furthermore, as I will deal with below and as Fahri fails to look at, the local imams are appointed through *istishara* (board-meeting; *istişare* in Turkish), which, in addition to the candidates’ piety,

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<sup>751</sup> Ebaugh and Koc, “Funding Gülen-inspired Good Works.”

<sup>752</sup> Fahri, *New Social Classes and Movements*, 115.

<sup>753</sup> Ibid.

<sup>754</sup> Ibid.

takes into account their representational quality of *hizmet* (*temsilcilik*) and the local needs for a certain type of imams: for instance, for a region that has an imminent and necessary project of the establishment of a school, someone who has special knowledge and required experience is more likely appointed even occasionally imported from other regions. As for the claimed ambition to become a higher imam, it should be noted that the duty of the imamhood is far difficult, as it requires such qualities of hard-working and self-sacrifice as to abandon personal life: in fact, many imams are said to have experienced trouble in their family lives. For this reason, rather than rising through self-centered ambition, the local active members give trust and respect to their imams, voluntarily supporting them with time, labor and money. Otherwise, they would withdraw their voluntary fellowship with the imams, reducing the local project. In this situation, ‘the higher imams’ would consider replacing the local imam concerned. Surely, a vertical mobility among imams exists, yet, neither the criteria of piety and asceticism nor the spirit of *hizmet* legitimates vertical promotion in a self-centered imamhood. To this extent, it is hard to consider ‘the possibility of material rewards’ as an encouraging factor, but it is more relevant to consider ‘the religious motivation for personal salvation together with other people’ as the enduring factor of hard working and self-sacrifice in the imamhood. Thus, Ebaugh and Koc suggest that the imams’ feelings of responsibility for projects are a powerful force in involving them in the movement.<sup>755</sup>

As Ebaugh and Koc further note, “the fact that Gülen-inspired projects are always locally based and embedded in local circles of supporters locates authority and decision

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<sup>755</sup> Ebaugh and Koc, “Funding Gülen-inspired Good Works.”

making within horizontal relationships rather than a vertical, bureaucratic structure.”<sup>756</sup>  
This locality represents the horizontal relationship of the aforementioned three groups, which, to a certain extent, is reminiscent of Durkhemian division of labor. And, as shown in the imamhood, this horizontal division is interconnected by the shared code of the Sufi qualities as asceticism, pietism and humanitarian love. To this extent, the movement, as the sum of this local horizontal relationship, becomes a traffic ground of Sufi qualities.

### *Dershane*

The clearest example of both the horizontal relationship and the traffic of Sufism is *Işık Evler* (Light Houses), the unofficial core of the entire network of the movement. These houses have been more popularly and practically called *dershanes* (literally, place of study), which denote private dormitory-like residency for student members. Since the first light houses as the modification of the Nurcu-*dershanes* were established in 1960’s, the *dershanes*, following their model, have been founded all over Turkey and later in major cities over the world, playing a role as the most foundational nucleus of the movement. A *dershane* typifies a flat or a house, in which three to six college and/or pre-college students live together by paying the rent by themselves – in a few cases, the local *hizmet* pays for some poor students. Each *dershane* has an ‘elder brother,’ under whose guidance the students perform multiple activities of education, sport, *sohbet* and participation in the local projects. Fahri and other critics classify ‘this elder brother’ as a

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<sup>756</sup> Ibid.

“dershane imam” or “house imam” (*ev imami*), indicating the vertical line of authority. Bayram Balcı and others, however, insist to call ‘elder brother’ in the same sense that was noted above.<sup>757</sup> In fact, the members use both terms interchangeably, yet, in a more close sense to intimacy than authority. An elder brother in a *dershane* is generally appointed by a local imam. However, unlike the full-time and professional positions of the local imams and quite contrary to Fahri’s generalized contention of the materially rewarded position of ‘*dershane* imams,’<sup>758</sup> the elder brothers save some rare cases are not paid from the movement. Instead, most of them donate their own earnings for the local *hizmet*, as will be discussed in “financial resources” below. For this reason, I identify the elder brothers in *dershanes* with active members not within the circle of administrator in the aforementioned classification.

As for the functions of *dershanes*, Fahri simply suggests that “current form of *dershane* can be described mainly as a recruitment agency and a base for networking.”<sup>759</sup> However, as Gülen, his followers and many scholars unanimously stress, *dershanes* function not in such simple and superficial roles but perform much deeper and significant tasks. Gülen animates *dershanes* as:

[P]laces where the people’s deficiencies that may have been caused by their human characteristics are healed. Thus, these houses are one workbench or one school where these directionless and confused generations who have shaped themselves according to

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<sup>757</sup> See, Bayram Balcı, “Fethullah Gülen’s Missionary Schools in Central Asia and their Role in the Spreading of Turkism and Islam,” *Religion, State & Society*, 31/2 (2003), 158.

<sup>758</sup> Fahri, *New Social Classes and Movements*, 115.

<sup>759</sup> *Ibid*, 123.

dominant fashionable ideas are now healed and return to their spiritual roots with its accompanying meaningful life.<sup>760</sup>

This statement suggests that *dershanes* are micro-communities, which crystallize and represent the quintessence of Gülen's teachings and ideals including his ideas of Sufism. Relevantly, Gülen's thought with the reference of Nursi's works is studied almost without exception in *dershanes* through personal and communal readings of his works and audio-video tapes, having continually influenced and reflected in the residents' daily lives. As indicated in a member's interview in the earlier section, *dershanes* are the space for enriching knowledge and training spirituality. The enriching knowledge refers not only to religious knowledge but also to secular knowledge needed to transform society.<sup>761</sup> According to Yavuz, "*dershanes* integrate religious and secular publicity together and remove the boundary between private and public space by arming the students against temptations and seductions of the modern world."<sup>762</sup> By combining the two sorts of knowledge, *dershanes* provide "religious socialization," in Yavuz's term. In order for that religious socialization to happen, the Sufi model of self-training through asceticism, pietism and self-criticism is prerequisite and maximized. Through this model, Gülen's teachings of tolerance, patience, dignity, self-esteem and self-sacrifice are further

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<sup>760</sup> Gülen, *Prizma 2*, (Istanbul: Zaman, 1997), 12; Translation belongs to Greg Barton in his "Progressive Islamic Thought, Civil Society and the Gülen Movement in the National Context: Parallels With Indonesia."

<sup>761</sup> See, Yavuz, *Islamic Political Identity in Turkey*, 32.

<sup>762</sup> *Ibid*, 194.



internalized by the residents,<sup>763</sup> who, accordingly, become prone to be active members for the ideal goal of *hizmet*. Due to this function, *dershanes* are considered ‘embodied networks’ of the tripod educational system of *madrassa-tekke-mektep*. As Hermansen notes, “the fact that *dershanes* are functionally associated by Gülen with *madrassas* and Sufi lodges, demonstrates how they symbolically bridge the spheres of modern and traditional, Islamic and secular education.”<sup>764</sup> As she relevantly reads, Gülen teaches:

Tekkes and zawiyas, which, thanks to their heads of ‘light personalities,’ provided an important source in a certain period, were revived (ihya) in Anatolia, and due to their functions that were performed to a certain degree, became blessed source for us. It is very significant to evaluate the same houses [*dershanes*] as if a *madrassa*, *tekke* and *zawiya*, whose spiritual ranks are opened today not only to Anatolia but to all over the world. In these houses, it is indispensable to represent (temsil) such an old but never-aged spirituality by living in Islamic spirituality in its all exalted profundity, along with learning every branches of Islamic science like hadith, tafsir and fikh.<sup>765</sup>

As envisioned by Gülen, *dershanes* are now found all over the world, providing their residents spaces for enrichment in Islamic knowledge and spirituality, and reviving Sufi spiritual tradition through *shakshi manawi*. With this function, *dershanes* become the main resources of human and religio-cultural capital for the movement.

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<sup>763</sup> See, Hakan Yavuz, “Islam in the Public Sphere: The Case of the Nur Movement”, in *Turkish Islam and the Secular State: The Gülen Movement*, eds. Hakan M. Yavuz, and John L. Esposito (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 2003), 34.

<sup>764</sup> Hermansen, “Understandings of ‘Community’ within the Gülen Movement.”

<sup>765</sup> Gülen, *Prizma* 2, 13.

### *The official sub-organizations*

As *dershanes* represent, the movement in essence is a religious network that provides ideological foundations to and fosters social relations among the members. Remarkably, the majority of its official sub-organizations are not religious but secular. The establishments and the activities of its numerous media, financial and educational institutions, strictly observe their hosted countries' secular laws. As specialized institutions in their respective fields, they are successful within the given legal boundary. Most of them are non-profit, non-governmental and non-political organizations, whose activities encompass various civic areas. Nevertheless, as truly sub-organizations of the Gülen movement, all their activities converge into and centers on one single and ultimate goal of *hizmet*, sharing and following Gülen's underlying ideology. More specifically, their activities focus on *hizmet* of education and dialogue, as I will detail below. Suffice it to note for now that, for instance, local financial activities are primarily to support and be consumed for the projects of schools and dialogue. This is to say that, as Gülen clarifies, the organizations meet at the point of *hizmet*. In his metaphor, it is as if the multiple rivers flow down toward and are united in the sea of *hizmet*, as the unity of Islam secures the multiplicity of its manifestations. Consequently, the multiple specialties of the organizations in diverse areas are preserved and promoted. Further, due to their specialties in various secular fields, the relationship of the organizations with the movement is not tight-knit as imagined but loose-knit in reality as many scholars reveal and Gülen's saying 'secular issues to specialists' indicates. Thus, in terms of the relationship between the movement and its sub-organizations, the claim of the

bureaucratic, hierarchical and ‘top-down’ governing structure must be reconsidered. In the same sense, the relationship among the organizations is not tightly-knitted. Tekalan, Ebaugh and Koc observe that “every institution that is established, whether in Turkey or in the ninety other countries that now have Gülen schools, is a corporate nonprofit entity that is independent of the others and is managed by those people who are supporting the school. The only connection among these institutions is the exchange of ideas that arise from a commitment to the same goals.”<sup>766</sup> Insofar as the relationship of the members to the organizations is concerned, it is appropriate to see it more closely/intimately-knitted than tightly and bureaucratic interconnected. As *dershanes* exemplify, the members participate in the projects of the local organizations voluntarily for ‘their own salvation’ through collective *hizmet* activities. On the other hand, as Hermansen rightly notes, the members and the organizations are dispersed in terms of their volunteership and personalized/specialized approaches to *hizmet*.<sup>767</sup>

These three relationships reveal the organic and dynamic interconnection between multiplicity and unity of the movement instead of rigid/authoritarian-based relationship in the movement. At the core of this interconnection lies the pragmatic embodiment and manifestation of *shakshi manawi* (sharing the same feelings) for *hizmet*. In fact, as easily readable in relevant materials, it is the collective consciousness of service for humanity and its consequent activities that construct and strengthen the bonds among the members,

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<sup>766</sup> Tekalan, “A Movement of Volunteers”; and, Ebaugh and Koc, “Funding Gülen-inspired Good Works.”

<sup>767</sup> Hermansen, “Understandings of ‘Community’ within the Gülen Movement.”

the secular/official organizations and the religious/unofficial movement. More practically, these bonds come true by means of *istishara* system.

### *Istishara*

*Istishara* means literally ‘to seek advice and consultation (*shura*).’ In the Gülen movement, it technically denotes ‘board-meeting,’ a collective decision-making that is applied to all communal projects - even some cases including personal matters. Like almost all organizational systems in the movement, the practice of *istishara* has also become a main target of the critical media reports. To them, at the top of the hierarchical structure of “Light Tariqa” (*Işık Tarikatı*) or *Fethullahcılar*, i.e., the Gülen movement, lies a group of *Istishara* or *Shura* (*Şura* in Turkish).<sup>768</sup> Opposite to this claim, Gülen considers *istishara* as an Islamic democratic system of decision-making. To begin with, he explains that “He [the Prophet Muhammad] used to ask almost all people’s opinion and gather their thoughts, and [by this example] wanted the concept of *shura* to be dominant in communal life. He did *istishara* with Ali... But, he [Ali] was a boy in the study circle of the Prophet of Allah. Nevertheless, the Prophet of Allah found himself in the *istishara* with Ali in that age.”<sup>769</sup> On this basis, Gülen principlezes *istishara* as the single means of collective decision of his movement, as that “when three-five [persons] gather, the duty of individuals who have very reasonable opinions is to explain and try to

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<sup>768</sup> See, for instance, “Onüç basamaklı örgüt piramidi [Pyramid structure of thirteen steps],” in [www.milliyet.com](http://www.milliyet.com).

<sup>769</sup> Gülen, *Sonsuz Nur* 2 (Nil Yayınları). See, further, Gülen, “Şura,” *Yeni Ümit*, 3/24 (June-July 1994).

persuade his/her friends.”<sup>770</sup> He admonishes that the opinion may not be accepted even if the author’s best and continued efforts do not work. Regardless of an unaccepted situation, he/she must continue to be together with his/her friends: he/she should not tell outsiders against them; if he/she does so, it becomes slander, a sin that needs to be taken forgiveness from every member of a community, and if not, cannot be exempted from punishment in the judgment day.<sup>771</sup> Gülen further considers this sin of slander as an act of downgrading *shakshi manawi* that resulted from the togetherness of every individual spirituality.<sup>772</sup> In this connection, he signifies collective consciousness as an essential element of *istishara*, which together are vital to solve problems. For Gülen, “it is collective consciousness to do *ijtihad*; a team-work is essential for interpretation of the Qur’an and Hadith; those who do *hizmet* for people are ones who work based upon this collective consciousness. Allah’s mercy is among them.”<sup>773</sup> He specifies this collective consciousness as the humanitarian *shakshi manawi* by elaborating his humanitarian approach in the beginning of his discussion of *istishara* in relation to *shakshi manawi*. Herein, Gülen stresses that “one must find himself in the efforts to feed others although he/she is hungry. In this way, individuals can be *ghausiyat* and *qutbiyat* in a society where everyone relates to each other.”<sup>774</sup> Just as all concepts in his thought, the

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<sup>770</sup> Gülen, *Kırık Testi*, 202.

<sup>771</sup> *Ibid*, 203.

<sup>772</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>773</sup> *Ibid*. 204.

<sup>774</sup> *Ibid*, 202.

humanitarian love and tolerance as embodied in *shakshi manawi* is the core spirit of *istishara* as well.

*Istishara* in the movement is practiced in all collective issues. Unlike the critics' exclusive notice, it does not only refer to "big *istishara* meetings" (*büyük istişare toplantıları*) held among "big elder brothers," but also is applied to every single matter and project issued by any members and local *hizmet*. Ebaugh and Koc remarks the significance of *istishara*, as "*Istisare*, the collective decision making that occurs within the *sohbets* in regard to collective projects, results in each person's taking responsibility for making sure that the projects are funded and executed."<sup>775</sup> From this observation, they argue that "it is this structure that enables the movement to operate horizontally rather than vertically or bureaucratically."<sup>776</sup> As a practicing Islamic democratic system of decision-making, *istishara* in the movement presupposes and preserves the exercise of personal reasoning and opinions (*ijtihad*), and simultaneously, secures the bonds between the members, the organizations and the movement. This happens in a process quite contrary to the alleged blind fellowship, which is exemplified by, as noted in the previous section, Gülen's simple saying "open schools there" being fulfilled without a question 'why and how.' First of all, Gülen's suggestions come out from 'big *istishara* meetings,' as he theologizes. It hatches a series of smaller *istishara*, which evoke and gather the concerned member's personal reasoning as a prerequisite process to share the suggestions by awakening their intrinsic *shakshi manawi* for *hizmet*. Throughout this process, their voluntary fellowship follows, and on this basis, the detail issues such as 'where and how

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<sup>775</sup> Ebaugh and Koc, "Funding Gülen-inspired Good Works."

<sup>776</sup> Ibid.

to establish schools' are discussed. Finally, the decisions from small *istisharas* are gathered and reported to 'big *istisharas*.' As a mutual communication system, *istishara* occurs not only from 'top-down' suggestions, but also from 'down to top.' Any member and organization can raise issues for an *istishara* meeting, then, according to the involved *istishara* decision, proceed to 'bigger *istisharas*.' As Ebaugh and Koc imply, it is this process of *istishara* that secures the horizontal bond among the members in a sense of leading them to be active and find meaningfulness of their activities. As it ubiquitously happens in all projects of the movement, *istishara* lets down the bar between the religious/unofficial movement and its secular/official sub-organizations, playing a core agent role between them. As noted, Sufi qualities via the humanitarian *shakshi manawi* and *hizmet* are enshrined in this decision-making system of *istishara*.

#### 5.5. The financial resources of the movement

The overall picture of the Gülen movement's financial activities is quite remarkable. Its economic infrastructure consists of hundreds of foundations that financially support its socio-cultural activities around the world. It includes local businessmen associations that have been established in almost every Anatolian city and national institutions such as Asya Finance Corporation that employs over half a billion dollars in assets and ISHAD (Business Life Cooperation Association) that has 470

members. Owing to these financial activities, the movement is said to be the richest religious community in Turkey.<sup>777</sup>

This success has, however, garnered controversies and disputes on the financial resources of the movement. A number of people speculate about its foreign-originated resources come from the USA and Saudi Arabia, and on this basis, some critics allege the close link of the movement to the foreign institutions like CIA or RABITA. However, Fahri notes that these claims “present no real data at all” “but debatable conclusions.”<sup>778</sup> He further assumes that the critics make up the data with their counter-ideological propaganda rather than a fair analysis.<sup>779</sup> Many recent specialists like Filiz Baskan, Gulay, Uygur, Ebaugh and Koc challenge the claim that most resources are of foreign origin, suggesting that the movement’s activities are financially run and maintained by the charity of its members.

### *Theological elaboration*

Gülen directly rejects the claim of the outsider sources. According to Ünal Bilir, he reiterates that “the financial sources are fed only by the support and strife of the charitable citizen,’ who ask no pay for their service.”<sup>780</sup> In a press interview, in fact, Gülen underlines that the resources come from the people of Anatolia, swearing that “we

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<sup>777</sup> Filiz Baskan, “The Political Economy of Islamic Finance in Turkey,” 223.

<sup>778</sup> Fahri, *New Social Classes and Movements*, 125-126.

<sup>779</sup> See, *ibid*, 122-128.

<sup>780</sup> Ünal Bilir, “‘Turkey-Islam’: Recipe for Success or Hindrance to the Integration of the Turkish Diaspora Community in Germany,” *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, 24/2 (Oct 2004), 265.



do not need any help from anyone. We take this work [*hizmet*] as far as the ability of the people of Anatolia reaches... if I received any [financial] help from others [non-Anatolian], Allah would make me a vagabond.”<sup>781</sup> Gülen praises Anatolians as the people of altruistic spirit and the financial sources of his movement, as he recalls:

He is our people who give and give. If you say ‘not to give,’ they will be sad and unhappy. I observed many people who cried because they could not give. A man, who had worked in an important institution throughout his life, bought a house with the pension of his retirement. One day, I happened to talk for a fund-raising (*himmət*). After my talk, when everyone was asked a commitment, he could not find anything [to donate]. Descending the stairs out of breath, he came [to me] with keys. ‘Teacher,’ he said. ‘I bought this new house’ [please take it]. I said to him. ‘We can by no means take one’s house or the keys of the house. This is what you made from your sweat. You can give when you can do.’ The people of Anatolia are like this, that is, [such a] miraculous people.<sup>782</sup>

As this interview exemplifies, Gülen is said to have participated in many fund-raising meetings, visited wealthy individuals and tried to convince people to support his project of *hizmet*. While encouraging contribution, he is also said to have “remained distanced from all financial involvements,” and “this stance has caused people to be trust and confidence in his honesty and integrity.”<sup>783</sup>

In Gülen’s theological framework, Islam encourages trade as a livelihood and commitment of earnings for Islamic activities. He reminds his followers that the Prophet Muhammad praised his companions for their passion for giving, and exemplifies the first two caliphs, Abu Bakr who donated everything he owned and Omar who donated half of

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<sup>781</sup> Gülen, “Anadolu İnsanın Gücü Yeter, Başka Kimsenin Yardımına İhtiyacımız Yok,” *Zaman*, October 15, 2005.

<sup>782</sup> Ibid.

<sup>783</sup> Ebaugh and Koc, “Funding Gülen-inspired Good Works.”

his material goods to support those in need.<sup>784</sup> Further, Gülen illustrates Mawlana Rumi's expression that "then the Messenger said: How fine is the property a righteous man has! The water in a ship causes it to sink, while the water under it causes it to float."<sup>785</sup> To Gülen, "having worldly means or wealth are not contrary to asceticism if those who possess them can control them and are not overpowered by them."<sup>786</sup> In particular, his idea of socially engaged Sufism strongly supports ascetic-based economic activities. In his explanation of the concept "renunciation by heart, not physical severance" (*kalben terk, kesben değil*), Gülen clarifies:

Essentially, neither wealthy nor other-worldly possibilities are obstacles to asceticism (*zuhd*)... In fact, the essence of asceticism is 'renunciation by heart, not physical severance,' 'no-sorrow from any loss' and 'no-happiness for any gain.' From this perspective, it is always possible to be a very wealthy and ascetic (*zahid*) servant [of Allah]... A man, who can understand this aspect, can earn by working just like a citizen of this world and can be as rich as *Qarun*. It is possible because he/she, when required, gives whatever in his/her hands in the direction of the Pleasure of Lord.<sup>787</sup>

In Gülen's perception, the practice of asceticism is the way to be wealthy, and becoming materially wealthy and consuming it for the way of God is a very means of attaining 'personal salvation.' In another expression, as Gülen's Sufi way of impotence, poverty and nothingness assures, one who does so rationalizes and realizes poverty and nothingness in front of the Absolute Rich, Who in turn gives him/her keys to open the eye of the heart and to obtain spiritual richness. Therefore, as Gülen holds Sufism as a form of self-purification in society, he conceptualizes this-worldly richness as the way to

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<sup>784</sup> Ibid.

<sup>785</sup> Gülen, *Emerald Hills of the Heart 1*, 43.

<sup>786</sup> Ibid, 43.

<sup>787</sup> Gülen, "Mü'min, Zengin de Olsa Mütevazi Olmalı."

spiritual-purification. All of these theological concerns are the ideological foundations of Gülen and his followers' fund-raising conversations.

*The nature of fund-raising: himmet*

The core members have followed Gülen's model (*temsil*) of fund-raising. Specifically, the full-time administrators are responsible for arranging fund-raising meetings, visiting rich people and collecting contributions. Contrary to some scholars' argument that "the inner circle controls the community's financial resources,"<sup>788</sup> it is more likely the local imams' responsibility to secure the financial resources for the activities in their respective regions. Certainly, it is possible that the inner circle, i.e., 'big elder brothers,' engage in the management of some portion of contributions. Yet, such management is decided through 'big *istishara* meetings,' which mostly focus on the balancing of the financial flow. The members of 'big *istishara* meetings' are more knowledgeable in the movement than others, due to their primary duty to be concerned in necessities of multiple local communities or sub-organizations. In their meetings and with their knowledge, one common discussion topic is which region or area has surplus contributions and which region or area is in need of more contributions. For instance, to maintain and promote educational activities in Central Asia and other parts of the world, in most of which local communities are not established well enough to be financially independent, they discuss about how and from where supply necessary money for the

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<sup>788</sup> Gulay, "The Gülen Phenomenon: A Neo-Sufi Challenge to Turkey's Rival Elite?," 43.

regions. Due to their respected fame, ‘big elder brothers’ are still in many occasions invited for talks for local fund-raising, yet they avoid involvement in the collections, following Gülen’s model. In reality, the local imams, who have specialist accountants, are responsible for all financial activities in their concerned areas. It is basically because, as noted earlier, most activities of the movements are run around the local communities.

The fund-raising meetings are technically called *himmət toplantılar* (meetings for donation), which are the primary financial resource. According to Ebaugh and Koc, “*himmət* refers to one’s personal commitment to carrying out whatever needs to be done to better one’s community.”<sup>789</sup> Fahri typifies *himmət* meetings through his participant observation in a few of them: a meeting begins with the recitation of a passage from the Qur’an; it follows a play of some videocassettes about the movement’s activities; then, a speaker gives an encouraging speech, utilizing the Qur’anic verses and hadiths; finally, an experienced member starts the fund-raising.<sup>790</sup> Fahri notes that in a meeting, 75,000 dollars were collected, and this note gives a clue to understand *himmət* meetings as a main financial source of the movement. Although it is not known how much is collected and how many meetings are held annually over the world, this number provided from a meeting in 1999 suggests the significance of the meetings. In addition, it should be counted on that individuals remain free to decide how much they contribute; there are neither allotted nor required amounts for *himmət*. Ebaugh and Koc’s empirical research suggests that the meetings are the main financial source, and further reveals them to be

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<sup>789</sup> Ebaugh and Koc, “Funding Gülen-inspired Good Works.”

<sup>790</sup> Fahri, *New Social Classes and Movements*, 125-128.

experiential spaces for the members' passion in the activities of the movement,<sup>791</sup> as will be detailed in the next section.

The members who take part in *himmət* meetings consist of people in various occupations. Unlike frequently misunderstood, they cover not only wealthy businessmen (*isadami*) but also owners of small-to-medium-sized enterprise – like farmers, grocery shops, tailor shops, bookstores, internet cafés -, and government workers, teachers and so on. Even as Gülen exemplifies for his admiration, retired men are also found in meetings. It should be further noted that students also play a significant role. In general, as Hermansen suggests, “they may make regular supportive payments themselves and engage in fundraising along family and friends networks in order to support the group's broader mission.”<sup>792</sup> In particular, compared to those in Turkey, students in other countries are reported to have more actively engaged in *himmət* meetings. As Ebaugh and Koc's research in a local community of the movement in the USA indicates, many of them contribute their earnings from scholarship, stipends or part-time works.<sup>793</sup> The members in business and employed status are general called ‘*esnaf abiler*’ (elder brothers in corporation). Among these *esnafs*, those who have volunteered to take on more responsibility as a board of trustees or sponsors are called *mutawalli* (caretaker; *mutevelli* in Turkish). As Ebaugh and Koc points out, anyone, who is able to spare time for consistently and actively performing the needed responsibilities, can be in the *mutawalli* circle.

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<sup>791</sup> Ebaugh and Koc, “Funding Gülen-inspired Good Works.”

<sup>792</sup> Hermansen, “Understandings of ‘Community’ within the Gülen Movement.”

<sup>793</sup> Ebaugh and Koc, “Funding Gülen-inspired Good Works.”

*The reasons for the willing contribution*

The members' willing contribution of considerable amount, which has gained the movement the financial autonomy, has drawn scholarly attention especially about the reasons behind the voluntary charity. The majority of the scholars at issue find Gülen's ideology as a motivational factor in the members' economic activities. They explain the members' economic activities by utilizing the same Weberian model as used for identifying the members with 'activist pietic ascetics.' To the scholars, the virtue of hard-work and the practice of asceticism are the involved factors, being well comparable to the Weberian Calvinists. Supporting this scholarly finding, the interview materials of recent research further reveals several other factors that lead the members to willing contributions.

Above all, transparency of financial issues is remarked. An interviewee in Ebaugh and Koc's study explicates that "if we want to look at it, all kinds of information is available in every activity, we can be sure by looking at them."<sup>794</sup> This open accessibility is closely related to the local-based financial activities of the movement. Ebaugh and Koc point out that the local sponsors can easily access information on how the donations are used, because they "are knowledgeable about the status of the ongoing projects at any given time" and "they are personally responsible for many of them, either as construction contractors, accountants, serving on the board of directors, teachers, principals, etc."<sup>795</sup>

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<sup>794</sup> Ibid.

<sup>795</sup> Ibid.

The financial transparency and intimate relationship in a local community result in the feeling of ‘trust,’ as another interviewee implies that “people who support the activities of this movement do not worry about whether the support reached its destination, they don’t chase it.”<sup>796</sup> This trustfulness further comes from conviction for the movement’s religious identity, as a businessman notes that “people in the Gülen movement turn their ideas into projects, they tell how they accomplished their success. People trust them, if they ask for a project, they expect it from the Creator, not from creatures.”<sup>797</sup>

‘To please God,’ which reflects Gülen’s teachings, is another significant factor. A member raises a voice for this factor, asserting that “I do not get any worldly benefit by supporting the Gülen Movement... I hope that I will be able to please God through these activities and the time that I spend with these beautiful people. Other than this, neither I nor other volunteers have any other expectations. After giving your heart to these charitable activities, God never leaves you in trouble.”<sup>798</sup> ‘*Hizmet* for others’ is perhaps the most noticeable factor, as it is presented as the single goal of the movement. One of the Ankara businessmen is said to have commented that:

Commitment and dedication in this movement is very unique, that’s why the movement is successful. And also sincerity, people in this movement do not do things for themselves, they do it for others and most importantly to please God. We have a saying in Turkish: ‘Service to people is service to God-Halka [people] hizmet, Hakka [the Truth] hizmettir’ – that’s what this movement is doing.<sup>799</sup>

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<sup>796</sup> Ibid.

<sup>797</sup> Ibid.

<sup>798</sup> Ibid.

<sup>799</sup> Ibid.

This interview represents the donators' overall perception of and willing contribution for *hizmet* in the altruistic sense that Gülen teaches. In fact, this motif is not only involved in *himmət* activities but also is one of the primary reasons of 'becoming a part of the movement,' as Hermansen notes how a businessman was inspired by the altruism of the members.

In a way of highlighting the involved factors in the members' activities – including *himmət* contribution, a senior businessman suggests five principles of the movement: belief, self-sacrifice (*fedakarlık*) with resources and self (*mal ve can*), to have the affluence (businessmen) and be the first to set examples such as a supporter who must pay and also 'go,' to give with no expectation of praise or reward, and humility.<sup>800</sup>

As illustrated in these members' testimonies, such ideological factors as altruism, self-sacrifice and service for others are internalized for the members' economic activities and contributions. This aspect at the same time coincides with Gülen's teaching of *hizmet*, his appreciation of Anatolians as the people of altruistic spirit, and his insistence of the willing contributions as the main financial resources of his movement. Specifically, reflecting the discussions of the previous sections, all the factors manifest embodied and practicing Sufism in the members' experience in doing *hizmet*.

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<sup>800</sup> Cited from Hermansen, "Understandings of 'Community' within the Gülen Movement."



### *Contextual approach*

As discussed at length in the earlier chapters, Gülen's Sufism necessitates the realization of personal spiritual experience by actively interacting with a society. As a contemporary recast of the Sufi tradition, it further provides tools for the interaction. In this sense, social factors should be taken into account for a better understanding of the members' willingness to contribute. The members' socialization is preserved in and represented by, more than any other, their economic activities, which are intrinsically linked to and greatly influenced by the socio-economic context of contemporary Turkey.

With the cardinal point of the early 1980's, Turkey has been experiencing a significant transformation in its social, economic, political and religious structures. The 1980 military coup transformed a strict secularist stance of the Turkish state into its moderate attitudes toward Islam. Against the backdrop that the secularist trials of the privatization of Islam not only failed to satisfy a Turkish religious identity but rather caused social anarchy and chaos, the military coup aimed to instrumentalize Islam for a national unity, ideological conformity and political stability.<sup>801</sup> As a consequence, Islamic elements appeared as a main topic of official discourse, which now reconsidered them as important factors for social unity and political stability. In this context, the Islamic movements resurged to have exercised their tremendous influences on all fields including politic and economic sectors. As Baskan remarks, the support of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in the early 1980's boosted this transformation,

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<sup>801</sup> Baskan, "The Political Economy of Islamic Finance in Turkey," 220.

especially from the governmental-controlled economic system to a new market-oriented economic model. In this transition, however, the rates of unemployment and inflation were accelerated, and in return, the public's ideological and ethical commitment to Islam was more and more stiffened. Hence, "the rise of the market-oriented competitive individualism contributed to the ideological appeal of Islam."<sup>802</sup> According to Baskan, like other Islamic movements and tariqas that resurged from this political economic context, Gülen and his movement took a great benefit from the context. In particular, as an alternative to the rise of political Islamic movements, since the 1990's, Gülen's moderate Islam began to considerably appeal to the public, having gained approval from many secularist elites.<sup>803</sup> At the same time, his movement "used the opportunities created by a market-oriented economic model to obtain substantial economic power."<sup>804</sup>

An important suggestion of this contextual account is that the members of the Gülen movement came from and interacted with the political economic transition, which brought about the public's economic and religious vulnerabilities. By joining the religious-oriented movement, the members are provided a religious identity. This religious identity does not require political engagements, which may cause divisions of a society conflicting with the secularist regime, leaving behind an imminent necessity for an individual economic autonomy. On the contrary, the religious identity requires one to engage directly and actively in economic activities with its Islamic vision of *hizmet*.

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<sup>802</sup> Haldun Gulalp, "A Postmodern Reaction to Dependent Modernization: The Social and Historical Roots of Islamic Radicalism," *New Perspectives on Turkey*. Fall 8: 15-26; Cited from Baskan, "The Political Economy of Islamic Finance in Turkey," 221.

<sup>803</sup> Baskan, "The Political Economy of Islamic Finance in Turkey," 222.

<sup>804</sup> *Ibid*, 219.

Within the framework of *hizmet*, one is motivated to do ascetic-based economic activities for further willing contributions for others, which in turn satisfy his/her economic subsistence and religious identity.

The religiously-motivated economic acts of the members have been identified by several scholars with a new business model. Yavuz classifies the *esnaf* members as a “new emerging Turkish bourgeoisie,” who has internalized Gülen’s philosophy with modern tastes.<sup>805</sup> Uygur further explains them with the term “Muslim Calvinists” and “Islamic Puritanism.”<sup>806</sup> According to him, they are “religious businessmen” who work hard with a disciplined life in a way paralleling the Weberian Calvinist. Briefly touching upon some Sufi elements, Uygur considers the economic activities of the Gülen movement as ‘a new rational and modern way by the new interpretation of Islam in Turkey.’ “It is considered as new,” he contends, “because religious people were not for a long time interested in doing economic activities in a rational and modern way.”<sup>807</sup>

This scholarly discussion contributes to an explanation of the members’ religious economic activities in several aspects. First, it suggests how Gülen’s theological foundation affects and manifests in the economic activities of the ‘religious businessmen.’ Second, it sheds light on in what circumstances the members willingly donate. Third, its proposed ‘new’ model of business underlines the importance of *esnaf* contributions as the main financial resources of the movement. Despite these aspects, the claimed ‘new’ needs a further consideration. Without doubt, the members’ economic

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<sup>805</sup> Yavuz, “Islam in the Public Sphere:” 37.

<sup>806</sup> Uygur, “‘Islamic Puritanism’ as a Source of Economic Development.”

<sup>807</sup> Ibid.

activities are new in terms of the distinctiveness of their play-grounding context. However, it is accountable if the activities themselves are a *re-surgence* in the new contemporary conditions. To me, this question should be explained, especially in terms of Gülen's core concept of *shakshi manawi*.

### *Cultural roots*

As noted earlier, Gülen attributes the willing contribution of the members to the altruistic spirit of the Anatolian people. Obviously, the 'Anatolian spirit' implies the inherited virtue from the tradition, that is, *shakshi manawi*. To this extent, it is reasonable that the members' religiously-motivated economic activities are not new but in the tradition. Gülen's works do not give a specific historical account for this aspect. Nevertheless, his brief explanation of *futuwwa* suggests cultural roots of the members' economic and altruistic activities.

Gülen sees *futuwwa* (youth and chivalry) as "a station on the path to God as well as a dimension of sainthood" with its altruistic virtues of generosity, mercifulness, humility and piety.<sup>808</sup> To him, Ali, the fourth Caliph, is one of the greatest representatives of *futuwwa*, who "always considered others first even when he was in need."<sup>809</sup> From this consideration, Gülen encourages one to be like a *fata* (young, chivalrous one), who is totally convinced of Divine Unity, lives a pure, spiritual life without being captivated by

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<sup>808</sup> Gülen, *Emerald Hills of the Heart 1*, 81.

<sup>809</sup> *Ibid*, 82-83.

carnal or bodily desires, and so can climb upward to the peak of *futuwwa*, “a treasure obtainable by climbing high beyond all the ‘highest mountains of the world’.”<sup>810</sup>

A relational reading of this view with his concepts of *hizmet/shakshi manawi* and the examination of Chapter 2 may suffice for noting a meaningful and significant connection between the contemporary form of the ‘ascetic-altruistic religious business group’ and the Turkish tradition of Islamic economic life.

To begin with, it deserves to note *waqf* (pl. *awqaf*) tradition. As a contemporary Turkish word, *waqf* denotes the religious foundations established by economically powerful groups, which constitute the Islamic sub-economy. This connotation comes from a long historical line dating back to the Seljuk Anatolia. In the Ottoman history, *waqf* referred to the economic endowment of religious and social foundations, which had exerted its role most clearly as “the key economic institution underlying the vitality and effectiveness of Muslim expression.”<sup>811</sup> In particular, *waqf*, as the legal institution of the charitable endowment, “was the most prominent instrument in the creation of Sufi social agencies,” which wealthy Empire elites endowed numerous facilities for the use of Sufis.<sup>812</sup> As Köprülü traces further, the early formation and diffusion of *waqf* were greatly owing to the Seljuk rulers of Anatolia, who, having been deeply inspired by Sufi shaykhs, constructed numerous tekkes and assigned *awqaf* to the tekkes in the new countries that they conquered.<sup>813</sup> Nevertheless, as Yasar Ozturk remarks, the primitive

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<sup>810</sup> Ibid. 83.

<sup>811</sup> Menage, “The Islamization of Anatolia,” 352.

<sup>812</sup> Karamustafa. *God's Unruly Friends*, 89-90.

<sup>813</sup> Köprülü, *Islam in Anatolia*, 9.

origin of *waqf* was indebted to the *akhi* groups, which fostered *esnaf awqaf* as the establishment of societies of mutual assistance.<sup>814</sup>

As mentioned in Chapter 2, the *akhi* groups were the important and widespread trade guilds in the thirteenth and the fourteenth centuries. In detail, *akhi*, as a Turkish word, means *fata* in Arabic, which denotes one who possesses *futuwwa*.<sup>815</sup> *Futuwwa*, as a term circulated among early Sufis, referred to moral qualities that every Muslim should strive to cultivate.<sup>816</sup> At the heart of such moral qualities lies ‘altruism,’ i.e., ‘putting the interests of others ahead of one’s own interests.’<sup>817</sup> Trimingham notes that in the early Sufism, *futuwwa* was used not for an organization but as Sufis’ ethical perception, as Ahmad Rifai’s conception of *futuwwa* as ‘working for God’s sake, not for any reward.’<sup>818</sup> Meanwhile, Ozturk points out the usage of *futuwwa* for ‘a loosely-knit group of brotherhoods’ as early as the eighth century.<sup>819</sup> According to him, these *futuwwa* brotherhoods appeared in Anatolia in the thirteenth century and came to be known as *akhi* groups.<sup>820</sup>

Ozturk’s study sheds light on the following characteristics of the *akhi* groups. First, they, as trade guilds, contributed to the economic independence of the Turkish

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<sup>814</sup> Yasar Ozturk, *The Eye of the Heart*, (Istanbul: Red-house Press, 1988), 57.

<sup>815</sup> For a detailed examination of the original meaning of *futuwwa*, see, Deodaat Anne Breebaart, *The Development and Structure of the Turkish Futuwwah Guilds*, 5-8.

<sup>816</sup> *Ibid*, 9-30.

<sup>817</sup> Ozturk, *The Eye of the Heart*, 56.

<sup>818</sup> Trimingham, *The Sufi Orders in Islam*, 24.

<sup>819</sup> Ozturk, *The Eye of the Heart*, 56.

<sup>820</sup> *Ibid*, 57.

populace, for instance, by helping employment of a great number of craftsmen as well as helping the poor and indigent. Second, in the rural area, they were known as “Association of Friends,” each of which consisted of *Yaran Basi* (Head of Friends), *Oda Basi* (administrative officer) and the members. They were demanded to live with a set of high ethical standards. Third, the *akhi* members including those in the associations of friends were expected to undertake ‘good works.’ ‘Service for the communities’ was the foremost of the good works, including such civic activities as building roads, cleaning wells, hospitalizing travelers, and in necessary occasions, preventing social anarchy. Fourth, the *akhi* groups established and maintained communal houses as the spaces for the study of *futuwwanames*, the works about the qualities of *futuwwa*. Throughout the study, a member was expected to cultivate “a religious depth to moral ideals which the *akhis* strove to uphold.” At the same time, “the study was an essential part of training given to those who aspired to become members of an *akhi* group.”<sup>821</sup>

Since they were founded based upon the ethical code of *futuwwa*, the *akhi* groups played an important role in the social, economic and spiritual lives of the Anatolian Turks. Imminently, they became the major funding sources for Sufi movements. In particular, the *akhi* groups greatly contributed to the formations and the developments of the two primary institutions of Sufism, tariqas and saint cults. By means of these two social and cultural institutions, the spirit of altruism has been embedded in the Anatolian culture and inherited by its people. In my reading, this is what Gülen implies by ‘Anatolian spirit’ as a *shakhsi manawi*. Likewise and easily notable, the Gülen movement shows several

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<sup>821</sup> Ibid, 57-58.

striking parallels to the aforementioned characteristics of the *akhi* groups; its members' practicing *himmel* for *hizmet* reflects the *akhi* principle of 'working for God's sake, not for any reward'; its civic/local-oriented activities are reminiscent of the *akhi* 'good works'; its local organizational structure of local imam, *mutawalli* and the members is equivalent to *Yaran Basi*, *Oda Basi* and the members; the goal and functions of *dershanes* parallels to those of the *akhi* communal houses.

These remarkable similarities make it presumable that the current appearance of the pious/ascetic/altruistic-based economic activities of the members of the Gülen movement is actually the contemporary *re-emergence* of the *akhi* tradition. This presumption becomes more acceptable if two facts are considered synthetically: Gülen's thought as the contemporary recast of the Sufi tradition and the *akhi* tradition as the cultural origin of the spiritual and ethical code of the economic activities of Turkish Muslims transmitted through *waqf* institutions. As such a reformulation of the tradition in tune with contemporary context, the members' religiously-oriented economic activities and contributions are to be consumed for the altruistic-based *hizmet* activities.

#### 5.6. The activities of the movement

The resurgence of Islamic and tariqa-associated movements in contemporary Turkey has drawn observation and research. In academia, the Gülen movement is typically modeled for this phenomenon. Nevertheless, it has its own notable distinctive characteristics. Above all, as discussed previously, neither the overarching movement nor its secular sub-organizations are tariqa-related. Rather, it would be more correct to say



that the movement is a tasawwuf-oriented one, which manifests itself through its secular organizations. This suggestion is strongly supported by the core concept and single goal of *hizmet* in both Gülen's thought and his movement. Having noted the concept of *hizmet*, many scholars stress the differentiation of the movement from the other Islamic and tariqa-associated movements. Representatively, Michel insists that "Gülen's program is more open-ended and stresses good deeds or service to humanity (*hizmet*) more than spiritual exercises and devotions."<sup>822</sup> In this sense, he goes on to argue, the Gülen movement differs from the Naqshbandi Order, which maintains an explicit program of spiritual development monitored by the *shaykh*. Several recent studies including fieldwork further point out that 'doing service for humanity' appears not as political engagements of the movement but as cultural activities. In this sense, Uygur labels the *hizmet* activities "civic initiatives," suggesting that "this successful movement might be a proper example of how a civil society acquires its autonomy from the state. In other words, the movement plays a crucial role in the empowerment of civil society, which is very important for Turkey's democratization process."<sup>823</sup>

Within the framework of *hizmet*, the Gülen movement plans and carries out numerous 'civic-initiated projects and activities,' all of which are financed primarily by millions of people's contributions.<sup>824</sup> Significantly, all of these activities are fulfilled around two core fields, education and dialogue. In fact, Gülen himself defines the

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<sup>822</sup> Thomas Michel, "Fethullah Gülen as Educator," in *Turkish Islam and the Secular State: The Gülen Movement*, eds. Hakan M. Yavuz, and John L. Esposito (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 2003), 75.

<sup>823</sup> Uygur, "'Islamic Puritanism' as a Source of Economic Development."

<sup>824</sup> See, Ebaugh and Koc, "Funding Gülen-inspired Good Works."

movement as ‘the movement of education, dialogue and tolerance.’<sup>825</sup> More specifically, in his research on the educational activities of the movement, Agai argues that “in terms of formal organization, all facilities set up by Gülen’s followers are independent units and promote themselves as such. Yet they are joined in an ‘educational network of virtue.’”<sup>826</sup> Besides this educational network, as Ünal and Williams present, Gülen signifies inter-faith dialogue activities in Turkey and all over the world by making salient cultural and legal plurality of societies.<sup>827</sup> Following Gülen’s teaching and in tune with its globalization, the movement has focused more and more on dialogue-related activities.

Regarding these two activities, a point deserves to be restated that the aim of doing *hizmet* is for both personal and communal salvation. This is what Gülen’s assertion highlighted by the opening word of this chapter indicates. This is also the aim of the two focal activities of *hizmet*. Moreover, just as the concept of *hizmet* is built upon Sufism, the activities are directed toward, in Ergene’s expression, “the individual’s personal virtue and maturation, and the maturation of social relations” with “the Sufi, moral and spiritual depths that requires each believer to be modest and patient in his/her familial and social relationships.”<sup>828</sup> Michel concurs with this point with his observation that “for Gülen, Sufism is its ability to offer a practical program by which the Muslim can

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<sup>825</sup> Pope, “Interview with Gülen.”

<sup>826</sup> Agai, “The Discursive and Organizational Strategies of the Gülen movement.”

<sup>827</sup> Ünal and Williams, *Advocate of Dialogue*.

<sup>828</sup> Ergene, “M. Fethullah Gülen and His Movement: A Common-Sense Approach to Religion and Modernity.”

internalize Islamic faith so that it motivates a life of service to humankind.”<sup>829</sup> Having underscored these preliminary points, this final section will illustrate the manifestations and roles of Sufism in the activities of the Gülen movement, focusing on its educational and dialogic activities and examining the topic at both the personal and communal levels.

### *Educational activities*

Gülen reiterates the importance of education. He defines education as ‘the effort of understanding of human life,’ which “is a perfecting process through which we earn, in the spiritual, intellectual, and physical dimensions of our beings, the rank appointed for us as the perfect pattern of creation.”<sup>830</sup> Thus, Gülen teaches that “education is vital for both societies and individuals.”<sup>831</sup> More than any other concepts, his ideal of the Golden Generation (*Altın Nesil*) best conveys the significance of education. As I described in Chapter 3, the concept of the Golden Generation derives from Gülen’s conviction of Islam, more specifically, Sufism. Without repeating the details but rereading relevantly to this section, the Golden Generation is a generation, which realizes its self-purification with such Sufi practices as *muraqaba* and *muhasaba* and/or doing *hizmet* for others via *mahabba*.

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<sup>829</sup> Michel, “Turkish Islam in Dialogue with Modern Society: The Neo-Sufi Spirituality of the Gülen Movement,” 78.

<sup>830</sup> Ünal and Williams, *Advocate of Dialogue*, 34.

<sup>831</sup> *Ibid*, 306.

Being inspired by and sharing Gülen's emphasis on education, his followers have actively engaged in educational activities. Today, the Gülen movement is said to have, as official institutions, more than 300 private high schools and seven universities with 26,500 students and over 6000 teachers around the world,<sup>832</sup> and as an unofficial institution, numerous *dershanes* over the world. All of the activities of these institutions aim at raising the Golden Generation with a focus on *hizmet*.

To meet this purpose, the movement provides two dimensions of educational activities, internal/external and personal/collective. These dimensions actually appear as a two-fold one, as they are organically interconnected to each other for the realization of Gülen's theology of 'internalization with externalization' of faith. Thus, it may be not appropriated to examine the educational activities with division of the two dimensions. Nevertheless, the divisional examination would still be helpful to understand how these two dimensions are organically interconnected and in what point they are joined. Particularly, as previously mentioned, it involves the separation between the unofficial/religious movement and its overarching official/secular sub-organizations. In this separation, educational activities, which enable an individual to internalize required religious doctrines and practices, mostly occur through *dershane* life and *sohbet* meetings, while this internalized faith appears in the external/communal activities of official educational institutions of the movement.

*Dershanes*, whose principles were discussed in the earlier section, are the core of the entire network of the Gülen movement. In Gülen's schema and for his movement,

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<sup>832</sup> Agai, "The Gülen movement's Islamic ethic of education", 48; and Yavuz, *Islamic Political Identity in Turkey*, 193.

*dershanes* are the cornerstone of the educational activities built on a ground of the essence of Islamic education par excellence.<sup>833</sup> More precisely, the essence of Islamic education is attained by the tripod system, *madrasa*, *tekke* and military academy, which embodies Gülen's ideology - as he clarifies that "it is only when the intellect, spirit, and body are harmonized, and man is motivated toward activity in the illuminated way of the Divine message, that he can become a complete being and attain true humanity."<sup>834</sup> Consequently, *dershanes* essentially function as preparatory and primary spaces for an inhabitant's spiritual depth, intellectual enlargement and social relationships.

Coinciding with this function, a typical *dershane* life is led with three primary activities. The first activity is, as Özdalga's empirical study depicts, an inhabitant's spiritual training of his/her selfish-ego through internalizing Gülen's proposed Sufi methods and by living with other members. By personal and communal studying of Gülen's works and other books like Said Nursi's *Risalei Nur*, one does not only gain religious knowledge but also, as the works are filled with spiritual Sufi concepts, acquire necessary knowledge for his/her spiritual development. Although personal reading assignments (like the selection of books and the reading time) are matters of individual choice, they are usually followed by discussions with others and/or with the *abi* or the elder brother of the *dershane*. In general, an *abi*, with his experience in *dershane* life and knowledge of *hizmet* and local community, arranges group discussions. In fact, it is an *abi* that plans the *dershane's* communal activities and advises individual matters. However, as an elder brother rather than an imam, an *abi* maintains an intimate

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<sup>833</sup> Agai, "The Discursive and Organizational Strategies of the Gülen movement."

<sup>834</sup> Gülen, *Essentials of the Islamic Faith*, 106.

relationship with younger brothers in his concerned *dershane*. This relationship contrasts with the master-disciple relationship in tariqas. While the latter is based on a disciple's strict and life-long fellowship to the master's spiritual authority, the former is an open and situational relationship. That is, it is always changeable at any circumstance, for example, when *abis* or members move out to other *dershanes* or independent houses, or get married. Moreover, the relationship is constructed by the dynamics between an *abi* as representative of *hizmet* (*temsillik*) and members' voluntary fellowship.

Similar to *dhikr* practice in tariqas, reciting *jawshan* and *tasbihat* is also an important activity for one's spiritual experience in a *dershane*. Recommended by Gülen's teachings<sup>835</sup> and represented by his life of *temsil*, *jawshan* and *tasbihat* are recited collectively and vocally (loudly). The recitation is mostly performed after prayers especially after *fazr* and *isha*, when most of *dershane* members are gathered to make a group (*jammāt*). *Jawshan* and *tasbihat*, as a dua, consist of repetitions of phrases containing the name of God. A member – usually not an *abi* who instead appoints someone to lead - leads the recitation and others join. It is not rare that the recitation stimulates some participants to experience spiritual altered states of consciousness. It might be, as Gülen describes, that “one enters a mysterious lift ascending to the realm where spirits fly,” which “Sufis call this ‘peace of heart’ or ‘witnessing.’”<sup>836</sup> Despite this possible effect, it must be noted that the reciting of *jawshan* is by no means obligatory nor as much of a priority as in tariqas. Participation is left totally flexible according to

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<sup>835</sup> As an example of Gülen's recommendation of *tasbihat*, see, Gülen, *Fikir Atlası (Fasıldan Fasıla 5)* (Izmir: Nil, 2006): 41-43; and, *Yol Mülâhazaları (Prizma 6)* (Izmir, Nil, 2007): 37-40.

<sup>836</sup> Gülen, *Emerald Hills of the Heart 1*, 131.

individual and communal circumstances. For instance, as frequently happens, the recitation is shortened or skipped for personal study or other communal activities.

Along with self-training and study of religious texts, *dershanes* encourage residents to enlarge and deepen secular knowledge. Secular knowledge refers to one's major in colleges and information necessary for the benefit of one's social relationships. In many cases, *dershane* members in the same major study together and exchange information, and *abis* are concerned with their success in school, sharing their experiential knowledge with them. In fact, Gülen stresses the integration between scientific knowledge and spiritual values, and warns the members not to overlook one for the other. In a passage, he urges that "in order to comprehend existence completely, we have to accept a dual method of Sufi thinking and scientific research."<sup>837</sup> This exhortation appears in *dershane* activities, which prompt one to pursue scientific knowledge in such a way that spiritual training of the self in the study of religious texts motivates one to work hard in his/her study of secular knowledge. Thus, it is no coincidence that many students in *dershanes* perceive 'the seeking of scientific knowledge' to be equivalent to worship. This observation is supported by Özdalga's interview data through which she illustrates how general knowledge especially related to the natural science is sublimated to the level of Islam itself in members' experience.<sup>838</sup> On the other hand, as Yavuz notes, the pursuing of secular knowledge facilitates one to step into a society.

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<sup>837</sup> Gülen, *The Statue of Our Souls*, 42.

<sup>838</sup> Özdalga, "Secularizing Trends in Fethullah Gülen's Movement: Impasse or Opportunity for Further Renewal?," *Critique: Critical Middle Eastern Studies* 12/1 (2003), 68.

A similar projection of religious faith into profane activity is also observed in an inhabitant's development of social relationships in and through *dershanes*. To Gülen, a *dershane* must be a communal place where its inhabitants must get along with each other and train themselves by internalizing and exercising values of tolerance, self-sacrifice and altruism. As a grounding place of social relationships, *dershanes* provide many communal activities. While doing together such activities as reading circles, recitations and sports, the members also engage in various local *hizmet* activities. More correctly, they are indispensable human resources of almost all local activities, which necessitate their labor and time. The activities of *dershane* members include preparations and serving for communal gatherings like *himmet* meetings and dialogue conferences, teaching Turkish in local cultural centers, and helping visitors to their local communities. In doing these volunteer activities, the members are not paid materially, but compensated through the consequent growth in their own spirituality and social relationships, as the activities actually aim. In other words, these social activities are meant to be the external projection of one's piety and faith, which in turn strengthen his/her internalization of faith. Along with personal spiritual benefit, one may feel belonging and satisfaction, which in turn encourages further individuals' altruistic and self-sacrificial mind and behaviors.

Participation in *sohbet* meetings is another important educational activity for one's religious/spiritual knowledge and social relationships. The members in *dershanes* - in fact, virtually all the members of the movement - regularly participate in *sohbet* meetings. As discussed in the previous chapters, Gülen's *sohbets* are one of the most important binding elements of his movement, and their audio-video recordings are frequently shown in the movement's gatherings including *dershanes*. Having taken



Gülen's *sohbets* as a model, the movement has developed *sohbet* meetings, which are usually organized by local communities. There are various types of *sohbet* meetings from *himmət sohbet* to *dershane sohbet*, and from annual *sohbets* to weekly *sohbets*. In the meetings, local imams, elder brothers/sisters or invited speakers deliver speeches, typically referring to passages from Islamic texts and Gülen's works which they relate to personal and communal needs. Although the *sohbet* meetings convey religious and spiritual knowledge, their primary function is different from that of Gülen's *sohbets*. While Gülen's *sohbets* transmit his spiritual experience (*arif*) and intellectual knowledge (*alim*) to his audience in a way that they uniquely and effectively become a source of his charisma, the local *sohbet* meetings aim more at communal gathering than knowledge transmission. Ebaugh and Koc stress this social function of *sohbet* meetings, regarding them as structures "where individuals find the opportunity to socialize, chat, and exchange ideas about their projects, either educational or business-related."<sup>839</sup> Having observed that *sohbet* meetings are organized mostly according to participants' occupation or place of residence, Ebaugh and Koc characterize the meetings as a socializing network for the movement.

These activities, which are typified by *dershane* and *sohbet* meetings with the three major functions of spiritual training, religious/secular knowledge and socialization, represent unofficialized individual and collective activities of the movement that promote 'internalization and externalization' of faith. The effects of these activities appear in the members' highly religious lifestyle. As Fahri demonstrates in his survey on the Nurcu

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<sup>839</sup> Ebaugh and Koc, "Funding Gülen-inspired Good Works."

members and as Özdalga's study supports, compared to Kemalists, the members of the movement practice daily prayers, observe fasting and avoid religiously forbidden things such as alcohol, drugs and physical non-marital relations.<sup>840</sup> However, unlike the other Nurcu members, as Yavuz indicates, the social activities in the Gülen movement are more emphasized.<sup>841</sup> Likewise, all the aforementioned and represented activities show how the internalization and the externalization organically interact with each other to the benefit of one's religiosity and social relationship. Notably, at the center of this interaction lie the embodied Sufi elements of Gülen's teachings from personal spiritual training to altruistic-based communal activities. In a similar sense, Gulay describes that "Gülen directs the Sufi concentration on inner spirituality toward the worldly realm. The taming of the corporeal body by means of spiritual transcendence, a fundamental notion in Sufi practice, is exploited to achieve mastery of the world through social activity. After achieving transcendence and constant 'God-consciousness,' disciples are enjoined to perpetuate this knowledge of God in daily life, performing acts of service that reflect their intense subjective spiritual experience."<sup>842</sup>

In terms of the involvement of Sufi qualities in the movement's activities, it might be further suggested that the ritualistic collective activities and experiences like *jawshan* and *sohbet* can be considered as the popular pietistic aspect of Sufism. As previously noted, communal recitation of *jawshan/tasbihat* and listening Gülen's 'spiritual *sohbets*'

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<sup>840</sup> Fahri, *New Social Classes and Movements*, 171-175, and 255; Özdalga, "Secularizing Trends in Fethullah Gülen's Movement," 72.

<sup>841</sup> Yavuz, *Islamic Political Identity in Turkey*, 192-194.

<sup>842</sup> Gulay, "The Gülen Phenomenon: A Neo-Sufi Challenge to Turkey's Rival Elite?," 55.

in communal gatherings lead many members to have spiritual experiences. In fact, Ali Ünal, a core intellectual of the Gülen movement, puts forward *jawshan* and *tasbihat* along with prayers in his contention that "we are the heirs of the Sufis."<sup>843</sup> This aspect may be called 'a popular pietistic dimension' of Sufism, being added to the two dimensional experiences of Sufism, the spiritual dimension as a personal mystical experience and the communal dimension as a social/shared experience. Nonetheless, just as the movement embodies 'Sufism without tariqa,' this dimension does not parallel the popular pietism of the tariqas. Compared to the centrality of *dhikr* in tariqas as a primary means of spiritual inspiration, the recitation of *jawshan/tasbihat* in the Gülen movement, as aforementioned, is not obligatory but subordinated by other activities even including personal pursuit of secular knowledge. As Özdalga remarks, "reading, individually or in groups, is characteristic of the Gülen community."<sup>844</sup> She further regards this importance of personal studies a departing aspect of the movement from other Islamic movements. According to Özdalga, unlike most revivalist groups who emphasize the importance of reading holy texts in combination with other rituals like *dhikr* or *sama* ceremonies, "the importance of the written word, or printed texts, is relatively greater among Gülen's adherents, who refrain from other forms of physical ritual and can, therefore, be described as more intellectual in their religious practices than other Islamic communities in Turkey."<sup>845</sup> In addition, although, as practiced in the Naqshbandiyya, Gülen's *sohbets*

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<sup>843</sup> See, Hermansen, "Understandings of 'Community' within the Gülen Movement."

<sup>844</sup> Özdalga, "Redeemer or Outsider? The Gülen Community in the Civilizing Process," *The Muslim World*, 95 (2005), 436.

<sup>845</sup> Ibid.

result in a spiritual bond between him and his followers, the *sohbet* meetings of the movement are more socially-oriented than spiritually-binding. Far more importantly in terms of the characteristic of the movement, popular pietistic dimension of Sufism appears in communal activities for *hizmet*, which requires the embodiment of such Sufi qualities of petic, ascetic and altruistic. In other words, it is actually *hizmet*, the common and ultimate goal of the movement, which leads its members to a popular pietistic dimension of Sufism. To this extent, unlike tariqa-based ritualistic experiences, the educational activities of the Gülen movement suggest the existence of ideology-based popular pietistic experiences, which are sublimated to and become parts of *hizmet*. It seems to me that herein lies a key to understand the mystery and seemingly discordance of the movement, whose highly religious unofficial members lead secular/official educational activities.

There are hundreds of official educational institutions affiliated with the movement. About half are located outside of Turkey, especially in Central Asian countries, and their numbers continually increase. Notably, all of them are non-religious institutions run by thousands of teachers, most of whom are members of the Gülen movement. Özdalga observes that “[in these institutions] religion has never been part of the curriculum,” stressing that “from the start, their syllabi have been under the strict control of the Turkish Ministry of Education, which means that they have applied the same program as other Turkish public or private schools, with no special emphasis on religious topics.”<sup>846</sup> These secular institutions, as their statistical growth indicates, have

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<sup>846</sup> Özdalga, “Secularizing Trends in Fethullah Gülen’s Movement,” 71.

been highly successful at giving the movement an international reputation. For instance, Baskan points out that many of the institutions have successfully competed in the International Science Olympics: many students of the institutions are successful in national and international science competitions: and, those graduates from the institutions usually win very high scores in national university entrance examinations.<sup>847</sup> The secular identity and success of the institutions raise questions as to why an Islamic movement is focusing on non-Islamic education and the reasons behind its success.

The official educational activities of the movement began in the political economic circumstance of the post-1980s when the transition of the economic system toward a new market-oriented model permitted Islamic movements to open private schools. Taking great benefit from this transition, the movement “established private schools at every level, particularly at the high school level,”<sup>848</sup> in which English and Turkish are used as classroom languages and contemporary highly-updated technology facilitates scientific education. In this context, the above discussion suggests the involved religious/Sufi virtues in the identity and the success of the educational institutions. In Gülen’s schema, *hizmet* must be done in tune with time, space and needs: thus, according to contemporary needs and as the most important activities for *hizmet*, education should be given with the balance between spirituality and materialism, religious virtues and secular/scientific knowledge. However, in sharp contrast to general presumption that

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<sup>847</sup> Baskan, “The Political Economy of Islamic Finance in Turkey,” 223. See, also, Yavuz, *Islamic Political Identity in Turkey*, 193.

<sup>848</sup> Fahri, *New Social Classes and Movements*, 118.

religious curriculum of the institutions is not offered because it violates law,<sup>849</sup> in Gülen's thought, religious virtues are something essentially not to be given by curriculum. Rather, religious virtues should be inspired and instilled through teachers' exemplary behavior. From this rationale, Gülen admires teachers and encourages youths to emulate their altruism, piety and compassion--'nonquantifiable' qualities, as he describes: "some special people will be the teachers of this communal school; they will be the 'individuals par excellence' of the transcendental dervish lodge of this age; they will be the head teachers of the *madrasa* beyond these times; they will be the commanders of this collective barracks."<sup>850</sup>

Encouraged by Gülen's teaching, many members have chosen careers as teachers. However, to become a teacher and to do *hizmet* as a teacher is by no means easy task, as it requires internalized and embodied religious virtues along with the specialty of one's field. In addition, as an Özdalga's interviewee confesses, many teachers anticipate possible assignments in remote areas from Turkey such as Central Asia, Africa or the West. From these difficulties, the vast majority of teachers become active members and constitute the most important pillar of the movement. In order to overcome the difficulties and become an imagined teacher, they regularly and consistently participate in personal edification through local *hizmet* activities, which furnish religious sources of internalization and motivation to them. For this reason, most single teachers stay in *dershanes* or school dormitories, while almost all married teachers actively participate

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<sup>849</sup> For instance, Yavuz represents this assumption. See, Yavuz, *Islamic Political Identity in Turkey*, 193.

<sup>850</sup> Gülen, "What Should Be the Understanding of "Mujaddid" in Our Time?."

various *sohbets* and engage deeply in local activities. Therefore, the teachers in the classroom convey religious virtues by their exemplary behaviors of “tolerance, respect, diligence and commitment to the well-being of the community.”<sup>851</sup> Significantly, as Özdalga’s research points out, this transmission of the religious virtues is not perceived as a part of or for Islamic *dawa* per se but as a part of and for *hizmet*. On the basis of the interviewed teachers’ testimonies, Özdalga observes that “the Islamic confession [*dawa*] has become subordinated to general humanistic values that are more elusive than *dawa* in its conventional sense.”<sup>852</sup> Although she roughly touches, in Gülen’s thought and teachings, as discussed in length in the previous chapters, this humanism refers to the embedded Sufi tradition, which *hizmet* including educational activities strives for reviving it in Turkish minds and transmitting it to the world. This aspect appears, to the most significant degree, in dialogue activities of the movement.

### *Dialogue activities*

Gülen’s vision of Islam is based upon ‘peace, love, forgiveness, and tolerance,’ the penetrating terms of his thought. These humanistic virtues gave birth to and aggregately appear in his advocacy of dialogue. In a passage, he declares:

If we start our efforts for dialogue with the belief that “peace is better” (Al-Nisa 4:128), then we must demonstrate that we are on the side of peace at home and abroad. Indeed, peace is of the utmost importance to Islam; fighting and war are only secondary occurrences which are bound to specific reasons and conditions. In that respect, we can say that if an environment of peace where all can live in peace and security cannot be

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<sup>851</sup> Yavuz, *Islamic Political Identity in Turkey*, 193.

<sup>852</sup> Özdalga, “Secularizing Trends in Fethullah Gülen’s Movement ,” 69.

achieved in this land, then it would be impossible for us to do any good service for society or for humanity.<sup>853</sup>

This assertion, which represents well Gülen's perception of Islam and approach to dialogue, can be considered a manifesto of the dialogue activities of his movement. Put simply, *hizmet* should be based upon and conducted for peace. Significantly, this assertion, which is made in his article on Sufism "The Two Roses of the Emerald Hills: Tolerance and Dialogue," firmly locates dialogue in the purview of Sufism. Specifically, dialogue refers to one's spiritual religiosity, which is perfected by the externalization of internalized humanitarian Sufism.

In fact, Gülen's Sufism as examined in Chapter 4 suggests that his advocacy of dialogue is an externalized and pragmatized manifestation of his dialogic Sufism. His dialogic Sufism refers to the inherited and accumulated tradition of the humanitarian Sufism through *shakshi manawi*. By promoting dialogue, as Ergene implies, Gülen revitalizes the tradition in tune with world-wide contemporary context. Rather than for certain limited areas, people or cultures, he presents dialogue as *the* solution to human individual and collective problems of the world. In particular, for *the* solution, his dialogic Sufism serves as *the* method to rediscover humanism in times of hatred and enmity. As he restores Jalal al-Din Rumi as a representative model for dialogue that needs to be practiced in this contemporary world, Gülen is convinced that only by dialogue based upon the humanitarian Sufi way, people in difference can reach together toward peace and coexistence. As such a contemporary understanding, Gülen's project of

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<sup>853</sup> Gülen, *Toward a Global Civilization of Love and Tolerance*, 50-51.



dialogue presupposes globalization to a certain extent that his dialogic Sufism is globalized Sufism, which in turn informs the global dialogue activities of the movement.

Gülen puts his conviction of humanistic dialogue into practice by meeting with religious leaders from Jewish and Christian backgrounds. For example, he met with the Patriarch Bartholomeos, the head of Orthodox Patriarchate in Istanbul, Sepharadic Chief Rabbi of Israel Eliyahu Bakshi Doron, Vatican Ankara consulate Pier Luici Celata, and Cardinal John O'Connor, the former leader of the New York Catholic community. Gülen also visited Pope John Paul II in 1998, which created nation-wide response and discourse. His opponents criticized this meeting for different reasons. While secularists pointed out that neither he nor Turkish Islam was authorized to represent Turkey, radical Islamists interpreted the meeting as a humiliating challenge to Islamic authority.<sup>854</sup> More sensationally, some critical studies speculated that Gülen's dialogic activities were evidence of his secret connection with Christianity and/or of subordination Islam to Christianity. In opposition to these claims, a group of scholars instead signify Gülen's meetings as efforts to establish constructive interreligious dialogue that reduces the tension produced by religious conflicts. While Saritoprak and Sidney regards Gülen's visit to the Pope as an important step forward in Muslim/Christian relations,<sup>855</sup> Michel underlines theological commonalities like concepts of forgiveness and tolerance that lie between the Pope and Gülen as evidence that "Christians and Muslims have much to

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<sup>854</sup> Saritoprak and Sidney, "Fetullah Gülen and the 'People of the Book'," 335-336.

<sup>855</sup> Ibid, 335-338.

learn from one another and that, when their respective faiths are deeply reflected upon.”<sup>856</sup>

In a phenomenological sense, it is more important to note that Gülen’s dialogues with other religious authorities radiate symbolic meaning to his followers. Combined with his ideological teachings, his meetings with other religious leaders provide practical vision, hope and example to the followers, leading them to various and focalized dialogic activities.

Having started from Turkey, the Gülen movement has expended its dialogue activities over the world. It established numerous institutions as advance bases for dialogue activities, including dialogue institutes, cultural exchange centers and Rumi forums. Although these institutions have different titles in accordance with their specializations, they all focus on interfaith and intercultural activities like conferences, meetings, forums and trips to Turkey. Significantly, almost all of these institutional activities are hosted by the local *hizmet* communities from planning, financial supporting, organizing to opening. In fact, one of the first formal activities after the new establishment of a local community is dialogue. From that onward, dialogue activity becomes a major activity, which bridges not only between different religious people but also among the members of a local community. In other words, it is communal activity that involves local members whose voluntary labor, time and donations are essential to actualize plans in exchange for the internalization of their spirituality. To figure out the common characteristics of dialogue activities, it may suffice to note two examples out of

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<sup>856</sup> Thomas Michel, “Two Frontrunners for Peace: John Paul II and Fethullah Gülen.” Presented at the *Frontrunners of Peace symposia* organized by the Cosmicus Foundation (Holland, 2005). Available online at [en.fgulen.com](http://en.fgulen.com).

the existing numerous institutions, which, to my reading, well represent dialogue activities both in Turkey and in the United States.

One of the most well-known institutions for dialogue in Turkey both in the public sphere and academic circles is the Journalists and Writers Foundation (*Türkiye Yazarlar ve Gazeteciler Vakfı*). This foundation was established in 1994 when Gülen, as the honorary president, made his first media appearance, in which he emphasized dialogue, tolerance, pluralism and democracy.<sup>857</sup> With a motto of ‘tolerance and dialogue,’ the foundation is informed by three platforms, which have their respective foci: the Abant Platform, which “aims to create a ‘common intellect’ that can define social problems, break them down into pieces, and brainstorm in a collective manner to deliberate the public and propose solutions”; the Intercultural Dialogue Platform, which focuses more on common aspects between different religious, ethnic and cultural groups, for instance, with an emphasis on the concept of ‘Abrahamic Religions’ as a starting point of dialogue between Muslim, Jewish and Christian participants; the Dialogue Eurasia Platform, which forges close cultural ties with Russia, Turkic Republics of Central Asia and Turkey.<sup>858</sup> Among many other activities like interfaith trips, which include visiting mosques, synagogues and churches, meetings as part of Ramadan dinners (*iftar*; fast-breaking) are the most common and important activities of the foundation. In these dinners, a veritable mosaic of participants from different religious and occupational backgrounds is gathered for open conversation and sharing peace and dialogue. The inauguration of Armenian Patriarch Mesrob Mutafian at a dinner meeting depicts the

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<sup>857</sup> Ugur, “Religion as a Source of Social Capital?.”

<sup>858</sup> Ibid.

consequence of the dialogue activities of the foundation, as he said that “people who shared the same religion could not get together in this country until recent times, now people from different religions come together at the same dinner... The person to thank for this is Fethullah Gülen and the foundation of which he is the honorary president. We followed the path opened by him.”<sup>859</sup> As Fahri argues, this type of declaration may be interpreted as contributing to Gülen’s public image as a charismatic figure.<sup>860</sup> Nonetheless, as relevant literature clarifies, it is at least as obvious that Gülen’s image is thus unusual used to open the possibilities that interfaith dialogue can be done in a more practical and appropriate way. And indeed, due to this practical consequence, the dialogue activities of the movement have soon spread all over the world including the United States.

The Institute of Interfaith Dialog for World Peace, which was established in 2002 in Texas, is the movement’s front-runner of interfaith/cultural dialogue projects in the States. Its website describes its mission thusly “The Institute of Interfaith Dialog is a non-profit organization whose primary goal is to help bring together the communities in order to promote compassion, cooperation, partnership and community service through interfaith dialog and conversation.”<sup>861</sup> In order for that promotion of interfaith dialogue and understanding to happen, the institute organizes and supports numerous activities,

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<sup>859</sup> “Mutafian: We Follow the Path Opened by Gülen,” *Zaman*, 02 December 2003. For a glimpse at general activities of this foundation, see, *Gazeteciler ve Yazarlar Vakfı, Medya Aynasında Fethullah Gülen* (Istanbul: Gazeteciler ve Yazarlar Vakfı Yayinlari, 1999); *Abant Platformu 2: Din, Devlet ve Toplum* (Istanbul: Gazeteciler ve Yazarlar Vakfı Yayinlari, 2000); *Demokratik Hukuk Devleti* (Istanbul: 2000); and *Abant Platformu 4: Çoğulculuk ve Toplumsal Uzlaşma*, Istanbul: 2001).

<sup>860</sup> Fahri, *New Social Classes and Movements*, 121.

<sup>861</sup> Cited from [www.interfaithdialog.org](http://www.interfaithdialog.org).

primarily funded by “contributions on the part of members committed to the institute, most of them Turkish Muslims who are inspired by the teachings of Gülen.”<sup>862</sup> The activities include dialogue conferences and workshops throughout the year, an annual Ramadan interfaith dinner, which bring together people from diverse religious and educational backgrounds, and the distribution and share of ‘Noah’s Pudding’ as an emphasis on a common practice among Muslims and Christians in the Mediterranean.

Among activities of the institute, its program ‘Turkey Interfaith Trip’ deserves a special note, as it plays a significant role in the dialogue effort. With its sponsorship, the institute invites local people of different religious background for trips to Turkey. The primary purpose of this trip is to introduce Turkey as a living example of the harmony of different faiths to the participants. With the voluntary help of local members of the Gülen movement in Turkey, the participants visit several cities like Istanbul, Konya, Antalya, Izmir, Gaziantep and Urfa, all of which maintain traditions that make up Turkey’s cultural diversity from their respective civilizations. The descriptions of impressions written by the participants and posted in the website well display the fruits of this activity. A Police Chief expresses how the 10-days trip changed his old perception of the elusive goal of achieving peace and harmony in different cultures and religions to his new appreciation for the quest for peace.<sup>863</sup> The trip led a Bishop to deepen his faith and enrich his understanding of and appreciation for Islam. In particular, he notes to have been amazed by the deep commitment of the teachers, administrators, and sponsors of the schools and universities that he visited. A professor in religious studies concurs with this

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<sup>862</sup> Ebaugh and Koc, “Funding Gülen-inspired Good Works.”

<sup>863</sup> [www.interfaithdialog.org](http://www.interfaithdialog.org).

hospitality of the local members of the Gülen movement, in a way reflecting Gülen's concept of *shakshi manawi* and *hizmet*. He writes that "[B]eneath all of the passion for life embedded in this country, there runs a river of authentic hospitality that cannot be ignored. A people who are so kind and generous gifted us with their lifestyle reveals gracious hospitality and devoted service to humanity. I was changed by this experience because I believe for the first time in my life I saw in action what I have always been taught: devotion to God, service to humanity."<sup>864</sup> The description of Reverend Donald S. Nesti, Director of the Center for Faith and Culture in University of St. Thomas, gives detailed picture of the members' engagement in *hizmet*:

As I recall that trip, my heart overflows with gratitude to Allah for having led me to encounter the members of a movement which is having such an impact on Turkey and other countries. Never have I been so flooded with love and hospitality as I was on this trip... The sponsors of the trip and of the schools we visited, together with the students we met, radiate the intellectual acumen and the light and love that are and will be the only means of healing this troubled, broken and violent world. And even though the schools we visited are held to the secularist educational standards of the state, the community of believers who sponsor them and constitute their faculties bring an overwhelming witness to the truth that the One God is great, all compassionate and merciful. The intellectual pursuit is at the service of God.<sup>865</sup>

To the reverend, the members' hospitality was the fruits of love and light, as Jesus admonishes "by their fruits you will know them." He further confesses that "the visit to these places captured for me the essential dispositions of heart necessary for us to have true interreligious dialogue... We must submit ourselves to the way God will bring us

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<sup>864</sup> Cited from [www.interfaithdialog.org](http://www.interfaithdialog.org).

<sup>865</sup> Cited from [www.interfaithdialog.org](http://www.interfaithdialog.org).

together and put aside all the small notions of how the unity of humankind is to come about.”<sup>866</sup>

These descriptions about their trips to Turkey amplify the dialogue activities of the two representative institutions in particular, and of the movement in general. Notably, the members’ voluntary and altruistic activities remarked upon in the descriptions indicate the embedded and embodied vision of Gülen’s dialogue and *hizmet*. As noted earlier, Gülen’s concept and practice of dialogue is based upon his idea of dialogic Sufism, and to this extent, it is certain that the altruistic and self-sacrificing dialogue activities of the members are closely related to their perception of the inherited humanitarian Sufism.

Several scholars suggest that the movement’s dialogue activities provide an alternative solution to human individual and collective problems of the world. For instance, Ugur concludes his survey of the Abant Platform with a stress that “the open dialogue and reconciliation that takes place in Abant demystifies social problems that were seen as intractable. This in turn depoliticizes social problems.”<sup>867</sup> Although Ugur does not touch, this consequence reflects Gülen’s dialogic Sufism examined in Chapter 4 as a method of *acting* with – not *reacting* to – problems. The observed demystification and depoliticization of social problems are on the foundation of gatherings and discussions based on mutual toleration that Gülen’s dialogic Sufism paves with. Furthermore, Gülen perceives dialogic Sufism not as a political element but as a cultural and humanistic bridge between the past and the present, the East and the West,

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<sup>866</sup> Cited from [www.interfaithdialog.org](http://www.interfaithdialog.org).

<sup>867</sup> Ugur, “Religion as a Source of Social Capital?”

rationalism/materialism and spirituality, and between different civilizations, religions and cultures. This doctrinal formation leads the sub-organizations of the Gülen movement to focus on cultural dialogue activities, which appeal to the modern Turkish context where, as Nilüfer Göle diagnoses, violence and anarchy have manifested as a result of the disconnection between past and future, tradition and modernity, and Turkey and the world.<sup>868</sup> Dialogic Sufism shared in the members' activities leads the members to connect 'between past and future' through its *shakhsi manawi*. At the same time, it enables them to contribute to the context of the rise of nationalism and the increase of global interactions. It helps to articulate Turkish global identity on the basis of the Sufi tradition of tolerant-oriented universality.

Therefore, it is no coincidence that the representation of the humanitarian Sufism is one of the most common dialogue activities of the Gülen movement in the West. Specifically, the institutions and the local communities of the movement competitively organize and/or support Rumi forums and his *sama* performances. A specialized institution of Rumi is the Rumi Forum, which was founded in Washington DC in 1999 with the honorary presidentialship of Gülen. Its mission is "to foster interfaith and intercultural dialogue, stimulate thinking and exchange of opinions on supporting and fostering democracy and peace all over the world and to provide a common platform for education and information exchange."<sup>869</sup> For this mission, the forum uses the name of Rumi as its official title. To the forum, Rumi is a symbol figure for love, tolerance and dialogue, and like Rumi who embraced all humanity as personified by his

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<sup>868</sup> Nilüfer Göle, *Ufuk Turu* (Istanbul, 1996).

<sup>869</sup> Cited from [www.rumiform.org](http://www.rumiform.org)



message "Come, whoever you are, come," the forum aims to invite "everyone who has a desire to explore 'the other' in the spirit of mutual respect and tolerance."<sup>870</sup> Along with this specialized institution, many other institutions like the aforementioned Institute of Interfaith Dialog and Turkish Cultural Center in New York have organized *sama* for public access to Rumi's humanitarian worldview. The 'Turkey Trips' that almost all local communities arrange never exclude the visit to Konya, the resting place of Rumi, which has turned out to be quite impressive to the Western participants.<sup>871</sup> These activities to revitalize Rumi's thought and practice as a humanitarian symbol contribute to create common consensus on the contemporary human problems. For instance, the Zaman daily news paper introduced a conference "Mevlana and Civilizations Dialogue," which the Dialogue Eurasia Platform of the Journalists and Writers' Foundation co-organized and people from more than 30 countries participated in. In this conference, it was stated that against the current recurrence of the threats of the absolute annihilation of humankind and the collapse of civilizations and violence that marked the age of Rumi, Rumi's inspiration of tolerance and compassion is "once more needed in our turbulent global village, which is full of students of the 'clash of civilizations' and neo-assassin terrorists."<sup>872</sup>

As much as the dialogue activities of the movement contribute to the global discussion of dialogue as an alternative solution to problems, they play a determinant role

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<sup>870</sup> Ibid.

<sup>871</sup> For instance, a participant wrote in his impression of the trip as that "visiting the tomb of the mystic Muslim poet Rumi on the anniversary of his death and attending the celebration of the Whirling Dervishes of Rumi were unforgettable experiences." Cited from [www.interfaithdialog.org](http://www.interfaithdialog.org).

<sup>872</sup> Ihsan Yilmaz, "Anglo-Turkish Cooperation With a Mevlevi Spirit," *Zaman* (09 September 2007). Available at [en.fgulen.com](http://en.fgulen.com).

in the members' communal and personal life. At the cost of their voluntary participations in the activities with their labor, time and material contributions, the members gain considerable visible and intangible benefits, which in turn secure their continual contributions and activities. The benefits are more obvious for the members residing in non-Turkish societies. Above all, prior to and along with communal and official dialogue activities for others, the members continually engage themselves in dialogue among themselves by means of *dershanes*, *sohbet* and other activities. This 'practicing dialogue' provides a shared-communal space of belonging, encouraging collective solidarity at the given social margins. Substantially, the dialogue has been crucial in anchoring newcomers and immigrants successfully in the new environment by introducing them to the shared space, in which they are bridged to the existing members who would be the best consultants on matters like getting a job or doing necessary paperwork for their legal stay. Further, their participation in various local activities increases the feeling of belonging, mutual sharing and 'togetherness' or 'brotherhood' in foreign countries. Likewise, dialogue among members becomes a problem-solving mechanism, which reduces common and individual difficulties. In this process, a series of dialogue activities, which require the members to internalize and externalize the involved philosophy of *hizmet*, play a decisive role for strengthening a shared feeling of belonging.

Significantly, by providing the members spaces for the feeling of belonging, the dialogue activities of *hizmet* direct the members to find and have an identity. Çetin recently observes from his interviews with the members:

The Gülen Movement endows individuals progressively with a capacity for action. Identity is constructed by each individual in her or his capacity as a social actor. Altruistic services always relate to human sociability and to social relationships.

Relationship is formed at the level of the single individual, awakening the enthusiasm and capacity of the individual for action. Through such sociability people rediscover the self and the meaning of life. Herein lies all the distinction of the Gülen Movement.<sup>873</sup>

In this statement, Çetin underlines collective social identity. Beneath this social identity, however, lies national and cultural identity, that is, as discussed so far, *shakshi manawi*, or more precisely, humanitarian Anatolian cultural heritage. In this sense, through altruistic service, one regains and rediscovers cultural identity, which prevents and saves him/her from identity crisis. The cultural activities of *hizmet* gives a necessary space for the individual's *re*-construction of identity against the threat of an identity crisis as one continuously oscillates between one's ethnic enclaves and a 'melting pot' of a multitude of ethnicities, attitudes, political agendas and religions. For instance, activities, which present Rumi as a humanitarian and dialogic symbol to westerners, simultaneously awaken the members' *shakshi manawi* of Rumi as a cultural icon for 'Turkishness.' In this way, Rumi forums provide an alternative space of belonging, meaning making, and value formation.

For Gülen, the cultural identity of the movement is decisive, as he warns that "a community that has broken with its essential cultural values inevitably loses its identity."<sup>874</sup> Gülen likens this community to "a barren tree," which some day eventually will be cut down and used as wood. In this regard, he teaches:

We should know how to be ourselves and then remain ourselves. That does not mean isolation from others. It means preservation of our essential identity among others, following our way among other ways. While self-identity is necessary, we should also

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<sup>873</sup> Çetin, "The Gülen Movement: Its Nature and Identity."

<sup>874</sup> Gülen, *Pearls of Wisdom*, (New Jersey, The Light; 2005).

find the ways to a universal integration. Isolation from the world will eventually result in annihilation.<sup>875</sup>

The self-identity refers to neither annihilation in ‘other cultures’ nor conflict with them. It is instead an autonomous identity, which makes cooperation and coexistence not only possible, but it is realized. This autonomous identity may be paralleled to Jacques Derrida’s notion of *differance*, which implies new and different meanings without wiping out other meanings. According to Derrida, all identities involve their differences and relations with respect to outside of the object: due to this relational independence, an identity is not to erase other identities, which are indispensable for the historical, social, and geographical production of new meaning.<sup>876</sup> This idea has appealed to an academic discourse on interfaith dialogue, which presents it as a theoretical framework to review “the logic of religious difference and elucidate its significance for contemporary culture and society” and to address the wounds of irreconcilable differences as well as the assertions of ecumenism and mutual understanding.<sup>877</sup> Particularly, Stuart Hall applies the concept of *differance* to his examination of “Cultural Identity and Diaspora.” Seeing identity as an historical narrative of the origination of one’s self, he proposes that a new identity is created relative to past and present ‘other’ identities, situating itself between being and becoming, position and positioning, and past and present.<sup>878</sup>

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<sup>875</sup> Gülen, *Towards the Lost Paradise*, London, UK, Truostar; 1996), 86.

<sup>876</sup> See, Jacques Derrida, “Différance,” in *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 1-27.

<sup>877</sup> *Irreconcilable Differences? Jacques Derrida and the Question of Religion*, Conference at the University of California, Santa Barbara, CA, October 23-25, 2003.

<sup>878</sup> Stuart Hall, “Cultural identity and diaspora,” in *Identity, Community, Culture, Difference*, ed. J. Rutherford (London: Lawrence and Wishhart, 1990), 222-237. See, also, Mike Featherstone, “Localism,

In a similar way, Gülen sees identity as an interacted manifestation of cultural root with respect to a given social ‘other’ object. Therefore, it becomes a subject of cooperation in universal integration. In this sense - not in terms of ‘national-centricity,’ Gülen presents his distinctive idea of “Turkish Muslimness” (*Türk Müslümanlığı*). In Gülen’s schema, Turkish Islam is the identity of Turkishness that with its humanitarian religious/cultural spirituality cooperates with ‘others,’ in particular, the West. With this identity and for the cooperation, Gülen teaches his followers to integrate into the Western societies fully by obeying the local laws and by supporting the liberal Democratic, market-economies without sacrificing their religious/cultural root. This integration with one’s ‘self’ means a dynamic relationship with others, acknowledging others and exchanging each other’s cultural productions; and for this dynamic relationship, dialogue is indispensable.

Scholarly debate on how effectively Gülen’s teaching of identity works for the identity construction of the members of the Gülen movement is notable. In 2000, Aras and Caha observed that it “helped many members of young Muslim generation to accept Western civilization as a suitable foundation for material life while considering Islamic civilization suitable for spiritual life.”<sup>879</sup> In his study of a Turkish Diaspora community in Germany in 2004, however, Ünal Bilir insists that although the moderate dialogue-oriented vision of Gülen’s Turkish Islam can be principally helpful, it is also hindrance to

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globalism, and cultural identity,” in *Global/Local: Cultural Production and the Transnational Imaginary*, eds., Rob Wilson and Wimal Dissanayake (Durham: Duke University, 1996): 46-77.

<sup>879</sup> Aras and Caha, “Fethullah Gülen and his liberal ‘Turkish Islam’ movement,” 11.

a full integration.<sup>880</sup> Conversely, Araxs Pashayan's recent research in the same area in 2007 finds a model for Turks' integration into Germany from the Gülen movement. In her observation, the members of the movement "attempted to find 'middle way' between the cultural devastation implied by assimilation and the 'globalization' of a minority group living apart from the majority culture."<sup>881</sup> In particular, Pashayan suggests that Gülen's vision of integration based upon interfaith and intercultural dialogue is the only alternative to sectarianism, isolation and radical relativism that have been brought about within the clash between post-Christian secular/liberal values and Muslim traditional values. This view is supported and developed by Nazila Isgandarov's investigation on the applicability of Gülen's view to the identity crisis among Muslims in Western society. According to her, the movement is very much in tune with globalization while maintaining its salient local characteristics. This Muslim identity, Isgandarov foresees, "will bring some relief to the identity crisis in the West among Muslims and integrate them to the society easily, and also brings relief to the Western society which still goes through the process of identity formation."<sup>882</sup>

Albeit different in their assessments of the value of Turkish Muslimness, these studies indicate a certain contribution of Gülen's teaching to the members' cultural/religious identity of Turkish Muslimness in their integration to the West. In a common sense, insofar as they are considered Gülen's followers who share with and

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<sup>880</sup> Bilir, "Turkey-Islam': Recipe for Success or Hindrance to the Integration of the Turkish Diaspora Community in Germany."

<sup>881</sup> Araxs Pashayan, "Integration of Muslims in Europe and Gülen Movement," paper presented at the conference, *Peaceful Coexistence* (University Rotterdam, 2007). Available online at en.fgulen.com.

<sup>882</sup> Nazila Isgandarov, "Identity as a Major Factor in Integration to the Western Society," paper presented at the conference, *Peaceful Coexistence* (University Rotterdam, 2007). Available online at en.fgulen.com.

internalize his vision, his teaching surely helps them rediscovering, maintaining and further preventing their identity from its absolute annihilation in or total renunciation from other identities. Particularly, this identity is continually reminded and preserved in their active and voluntary engagements in various dialogue activities, which, together with educational activities, have made the Gülen movement into one of the most successful Islamic movements in the contemporary world.

The grounding element in all of these concerns related to identity is Sufism. As easily readable, not only dialogic Sufism but also Islamic spirituality, Sufism without *tariqa* and social engaged Sufism are synthetically involved in all of the *hizmet* activities. In fact, as this chapter examined, these characteristics of Gülen's Sufism manifest themselves and play a constituent role in Gülen's leadership of the movement, and the nature, membership, organizational structure, financial resources and other activities of the movement.

## CHAPTER 6

### CONCLUSION

This dissertation, the first comprehensive approach to Fethullah Gülen's Sufism, investigated Sufism in Gülen's life/thought and the Gülen movement in order to provide a case study of contemporary manifestations of Sufism. For this investigation, I used Sufism itself as a methodological lens. I hold that Sufism is not just an object of study but can be an analytical tool, which allows one to see Sufism-related phenomena as they are, without necessarily reducing them to any pre-confined 'other' framework - such as culturalist reductionism or broad structuralist generalizations. In particular, as it was preliminarily remarked in the introduction, the trend in studies of Gülen and his movement has been to examine them exclusively from the standpoint of political discipline and discourse. This trend has dominated the controversial debate, producing less than constructive academic results. In contrast to this tendency, this dissertation employed Sufism as a distinct category of analysis and sought to understand the inner dynamics involved in Gülen and his movement.

From this methodological standpoint, I demonstrated the centrality of Sufism in Gülen's life, thought and the Gülen movement. In sum, Chapter 3 illustrated that Gülen 'lives' Sufism throughout his life in consonance with his conviction of Sufism as 'the essence of Islam' and enough to be considered as a Sufi. As Chapter 4 depicted, not only does he live in but also he 'speaks' about Sufism based upon how he 'lives.' Gülen's conceptualization of his embedded Sufi life in his thought was highlighted by four characteristics – Islamic spirituality, Sufism without Sufi orders, socially engaged Sufism



and dialogic Sufism. I contended that all of these characteristics center around and constitute *shakshi manawi* (collective personal consciousness) and *hizmet* (service for humanity), the two foundational codes of the Gülen movement. Chapter 5 forwarded that these core concepts based upon Sufism practically and motivationally involve and appear in the movement in all important aspects from Gülen's leadership to the members' personal religiosity and communal activities. These chapters make it possible to see Sufism as an 'inner spirit' of Gülen's life/thought and the movement.

Having underlined this main idea, this concluding chapter will holistically evaluate and reflect upon Gülen's Sufism with respect to the contemporary discourse of Sufism and Turkish Sufism, which Chapter 1 and 2 contextualized. Focusing on the reasons behind the appeal of Gülen's thought and the success of his movement within the broad context of the resurgence of Sufism, this reflective evaluation will highlight and reiterate the distinctiveness of Gülen's Sufism as a contemporary manifestation of Sufism.

### 6.1. Reflections: A turning towards Sufism

The resurgence of Sufism is a ubiquitous phenomenon in the Islamic world and the West, and the appeal of Gülen's Sufism and the success of his movement can be considered as a part, but more precisely, as its representative case. As discussed in Chapter 1, 'Sufism moribund' was predicted from diverse academic perspectives. Karl Marx's theory of class struggle, Sigmund Freud's psychoanalysis schema, Max Weber's rationalization and 'disenchantment,' and Emile Durkheim's social functionalism were utilized in scholarly assumptions about the incompatibility of religion with modernization

and for a declaration of the inevitable end of Sufism. However, the contemporary world does not witness the decline of Sufism. Instead, Sufism has remarkably resurged, not simply as a part of but further as a significant contributor to Islamic revival. Diverse manifestations of Sufi resurgence have been observed and various reasons have been proposed. While there are abundant examples, let it suffice to note the following representative cases which parallel the appeal of Gülen's Sufism and the success of his movement.

In her *Sufism, Mystics, and Saints in Modern Egypt*, Valerie Hoffman reexamines the Egyptian Sufi orders that led some scholars to proclaim 'Sufism moribond,' and observes their continuing vitality.<sup>883</sup> According to her, the vitality lies specifically in the characteristics of self-reform, sobriety, tolerance, non-violence and apolitics, all of which have made the orders resurge in contemporary Egypt. Itzhak Weismann's case study of Naqshbandi branches in India and Syria demonstrates a significant reformulation of the traditional order to cope with Western rationalism, the secularized State and Islamic fundamentalism.<sup>884</sup> He specifically notes the attempt to renounce specific Sufi terminology, even including the term *tasawwuf* itself. Coining this phenomenon "Sufism without *tasawwuf*," Weismann signifies it as an example of Sufi responses to and adaptation of modernity. Indonesia also exhibits the revitalization of Sufism, as illustrated by Julia Howell's article "Sufism and the Indonesian Islamic Revival." In sharp contrast to Clifford Geertz's prediction of the decline of Indonesian Sufism, Howell's survey depicts both 'new growth of numerous tariqas' and 'new institutional

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<sup>883</sup> Hoffman, *Sufism, Mystics, and Saints in Modern Egypt*.

<sup>884</sup> Weismann, "Sufi Fundamentalism in India and the Middle East."

forms' of Sufism that 'new kinds of people' have joined.<sup>885</sup> In particular, she takes notice of the modern reassessments of Sufism, which has led to "a turning towards Sufism" as an inner spiritual life without engaging in the practices and activities of tariqas to whose negative images caused many Indonesians to be 'allergic.' This reinterpretation has created a mood of "the disengagement of tasawuf from tarekat," leading one to add a deeper spiritual dimension to his/her ritual and legal observance. Accordingly, "the disengagement of tasawuf from tarekat" has made Muslim piety more attractive to people, and eventually, "has now become a conceptual strategy commonly employed by cosmopolitan Muslims."<sup>886</sup> Although the western interest in Sufism is not new, the resurgence of Sufism in the contemporary Islamic world and the globalizing context have accelerated the spread of Sufi teachings in the West. Classic Sufi literature continues to be published, and traditional Sufi orders have gained the westerners' attention with their revitalized characteristics of conservative Sufism. Meanwhile, non-traditional Sufi movements have emerged and developed with, for instance, the propagation of a universal essence of Sufism independent of the Islamic faith. Notably, the dissemination of Sufism in the West accompanies global manifestations of Sufism, known as 'global Sufism.'

Perhaps more dramatically than the other Islamic countries, Turkey has witnessed the revival of Sufism from the latter part of the twentieth century onwards, despite the official ban of Sufi socio-political manifestations and activities in 1925. Today, Turkish Sufism and its social institutions, tariqas, are observed to have reached peak levels and

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<sup>885</sup> Howell, "Sufism and the Indonesian Islamic Revival," 710.

<sup>886</sup> Ibid, 711-713.

acted as the main contributor to the revival of Turkish Islam. This resurgence is easily noticeable in all areas of society, and members of tariqas “have now penetrated all ranks of political society, including the parties, government, civil services, intelligentsia, and the business and banking world.”<sup>887</sup> Particularly, the political engagement of tariqas such as Naqshbandiyya and Suleymanci movement has played a crucial role in transforming the secular political system towards pro-religious political parties.<sup>888</sup> The combination of Sufism with politics proclaimed by such Naqshi figures as Mehmet Zaid Koktu and his successors, Korkut Ozal and Mahmud Esad Cohan, has provided a theological basis for the political activities of tariqa members. At the same time, Sufism has regained its visual activation in the socio-cultural domain. Sufi orders run Qur’anic courses and youth hostels that facilitate to disseminate Sufi principles and practices to young generations.<sup>889</sup> In addition to these visible manifestations of Sufism through tariqa activities, the psychological distance of the public from tariqas and the political secularist elites’ allergy to tariqas have foregrounded for and informed new institutional forms of Sufi manifestation. Having been unhinged from tariqas, these institutions function as civic initiatives and represent the revival of civil Islam. The foremost are the Nurcu movements, which have practiced Said Nursi’s teaching of Islamic spirituality without tariqas.

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<sup>887</sup> Umit Sakallioğlu, “Parameters and strategies of Islam-state interaction in Republican Turkey,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 28/2 (May, 1996), 244.

<sup>888</sup> *Ibid*, 241.

<sup>889</sup> *Ibid*, 244.

Gülen and his movement are typically portrayed as representative of Islamic revival in Turkey and in the Islamic world. Specifically, contrary to political Islamic movements, Gülen's moderate vision of Islam and the cultural/civic activities of his movement have been accentuated. Nevertheless, an absence of focus on his Sufism has left its relationship to the resurgence of Sufism, relatively unexplained. At best, it is unjustifiably and negatively categorized as a contemporary version of divisional tariqas. To the contrary, the examination of this dissertation makes it possible to consider Gülen's Sufism and its consequent activities of the movement as a prominent example of the reactivation of Turkish Sufism independently from the revival of tariqas. In fact, the reactivation of Turkish Sufism that Gülen represents joins the aforementioned case studies on the resurgence of Sufism in the other countries. Nonetheless, as the contexts that inform them differ, Gülen's Sufism has its own distinctive aspects, which originate from its interaction within a contemporary Turkish context. Its appealing factors further differ from other Islamic and Sufi movements in Turkey. This distinctiveness, its appeal and its role in the success of the movement has thus merited the greater examination conducted in this dissertation.

*Gülen's Sufism: A path of interconnectivity*

A synthetic reading of Gülen's Sufism and its manifestations through his followers' life and activities as examined makes salient the interconnectivity of Gülen's Sufism among different - even seemingly disparate - entities. Through Sufism, Gülen attempts to build a conceptual bridge between the past and the present, the East and the

West, rationalism/materialism and spirituality, and between different civilizations, religions and cultures. Although he does not present Sufism in any innovational sense, his interconnective projection of Sufi tradition into contemporary context makes his Sufism unique. In this distinctiveness lies the appeal of Gülen's Sufism, which has succeeded in drawing attention, convincing and mobilizing many people towards it. The following three aspects of interconnectivity in Gülen's Sufism have the most apparent appeal in both theory and practice.

The first aspect is Gülen's emphasis on Sufism both as Islamic spirituality and as Turkish cultural identity. Gülen holds that Sufism is Islamic spirituality, rooted in the Qur'an and the Sunna and amplified by later Sufis as a necessary way of interiorization of the Shari'a to reach the perfection of faith. Standing firmly on Islamic Sufism, he accepts neither the claim that Sufism is foreign-originated or extra-Islamic nor the view that there is a universal Sufi essence regardless of Islamic faith. Further, Gülen is convinced that as Islamic spirituality, Sufism exists far beyond the confinement of tariqas, which are nothing more than one of its diverse historical manifestations. In this sense, he reformulates and represents Said Nursi's idea of 'Sufism without Sufi orders.' As a prominent effect, his revitalization of Islamic Sufism has contributed to the retrieval and reinforcement of Islamic identity in the Turkish masses. A series of imposed modern conditions such as Kemalist secularism, the influx of Western style of modernization and globalization has shaken their religious identity. Against the danger of losing their identity, the masses were not simply awaiting Islamic revival but actively pursuing it and making it to happen. In particular, many of them found their religious identity in Islamic Sufism, which enabled them to regain Islamic religiosity and further strengthen it within

an internalization of faith and recovery of spiritual tranquility. To a certain degree, in a way coinciding with Howell's observation of "the disengagement of tasawuf from tarekat" as a modern Indonesian phenomenon, Gülen's articulation of 'Sufism without Sufi orders' helped to provide psychological solace to numerous people who were 'still allergic' to tariqas owing to Kemalist opposition, its projected image of tariqas as well as the history of political conflicts between some tariqas and the state. Furthermore, the public consolation in Sufism is directly linked to the fact that grassroots Islam in Turkey has long been informed by Sufi teachers more deeply than by the state ulama class since the first encounter of Turks with Sufism occurred in their westward migration process in the ninth century. To this extent, not only does Gülen's Islamic Sufism exemplify the inevitable resurgence of Islamic Sufism, but his Turkish Sufism has also served to provide identity.

At the core of Gülen's thought on Turkish Islamic identity lies humanitarian Sufism as an accumulated body of the Anatolian Sufi tradition. Humanitarian Sufism came into existence and was inherited by internalizing and vitalizing the Anatolian culture of tolerant and humanitarian love, as Sufi teachers such as Yasawi, Rumi, Emre and Bektash initiated and intensified. From this perspective, Gülen sees humanitarian Sufism as a manifestation of 'collective consciousness' or *shakshi manawi*, which acts as the bridge between 'personal spirituality' and 'collective personal spirituality.' To him, this collective consciousness is an essential constituent of 'Turkish Muslimness,' which prepares individuals naturally to stick together by sharing the same feelings. Thus, humanitarian Sufism is a culturally inherited and embedded reality in a much broader and deeper sense than a narrowly-confined social and/or political element. As such an

apolitical nature, it distinguishes itself from the new-innovational essence and political manifestations of neo-Sufism. At the same time, this humanistic identity does not correspond to the ‘national selfishness,’ which presupposes an identity of confrontation and conflict. Rather, it is an autonomous self-identity of co-operation and coexistence, which enables its holders to cooperate with other identities. Furthermore, in Gülen’s thought, this cultural national identity based upon humanism is bound to ‘melt down’ into and for humanity, and thus evinces Trimingham’s observation that “such things as contemporary concern in Turkey with the spiritual values of Yunus Emre, his love for humanity and human values, are not revivals of the mystical spirit, but expressions of the spirit of humanism, linked with the past and made universal in the spirit of the present.”<sup>890</sup> From the angle of such a universalized spirit, the national boundaries and differences that situate ‘us’ in relation to ‘others’ and the present in relation to the past are obliterated, and, as Kurtz observes, this is what Gülen highlights in his ubiquitous writings and lectures.<sup>891</sup> Gülen’s way of updating the humanitarian Sufi tradition in contemporary Turkish memory contributed to the opening of a nation-wide discourse and dialogue on collective identity. This opening has been especially significant within the context of “the assassination of collective memory,” by which Yavuz stresses the gap between Kemalist laicism of de-Islamization and the inherited Islamic identity of the masses.<sup>892</sup> More recently, Gülen’s presentation of the humanitarian Sufism appeals in

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<sup>890</sup> Trimingham, *The Sufi Orders in Islam*, 258.

<sup>891</sup> Kurtz, “Gülen’s Paradox: Combining Commitment and Tolerance.”

<sup>892</sup> Yavuz, “the assassination of collective memory.”



discourse, which proposes a construction of glocal identity of Turkishness as a world-citizenship.

Second, Gülen's Sufism directs the organic interconnectedness between one's inner spirituality and outer acts of piety. To Gülen, Sufism as Islamic spirituality leads personal inner spirituality to be reflected, enriched and perfected by its interaction with society. This is highlighted in his idea of socially engaged Sufism, which is portrayed as a synthesis of sobriety, activity and sociality. That is, any spiritual experience is to be rationalized with constant 'God-consciousness' in daily activities in social spheres in order to be valued and perpetuated. In other words, 'God-consciousness' makes one's attained spiritual experience rationally valuable for and internally perpetuated toward salvation, organizing his/her life, behavior and work accordingly. Presenting Sufism in this way of organic relationship of sobriety, activity and sociality, Gülen stresses the interconnectedness of 'internalization and externalization' in faith. This idea of socially engaged Sufism is a reactivation of the Turkish Sufi tradition, distinguishing itself in a contemporary context in which, as Michel describes, "many Sufis divorce themselves from real life and engage in useless metaphysical speculation."<sup>893</sup> As such, it has called people's attention and attracted them with its intellectual space of this-worldly asceticism. This-worldly asceticism has satisfied many people's rational inquiry, which sought meaningful connection between religious practices and mundane acts in their daily lives. Therefrom have this-worldly ascetics emerged as a new type of contemporary Turks, who,

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<sup>893</sup> Michel, "Sufism and Modernity in the Thought of Fethullah Gülen," 348.

mostly as an urban intelligentsia, have found intellectual satisfaction in Gülen's vision in which personal spiritual experience is rationalized toward its socialization in the Sufi path.

Along with the personal dimension of interiorization and externalization of Islamic spirituality, socially engaged Sufism indicates an attempt by Gülen's Sufism to interconnect individual spirituality to society. More precisely, his humanitarian Sufism stimulates, motivates and consumes individual piety for collective well-being. This third aspect of interconnectivity has also played a significant role of the resurgence of Sufism as a source of shared meanings of common goods and as its consequent civil Islamic activities. Gülen is convinced and tries to convince others that genuine Sufis are the seekers of spiritual progress in the happiness of others. In his rationale, doing service for others' happiness is an imperative way of reflecting and strengthening 'God-consciousness' in daily life, as the vertical relation of one's consciousness with God leads him/her to be humble in his/her horizontal relationship with others and thus enables him/her to love others. This humanitarian love motivates one to actively engage in 'service for humanity' or *hizmet*. To do *hizmet* and by doing *hizmet*, one cultivates his/her piety based upon self-sacrifice and asceticism. Thus, for Gülen, *hizmet* prepares one both a goal and a means for his/her personal salvation, enabling him/her to perfect religiosity. With the sum of individual salvational efforts, *hizmet* is best performed for the realization of collective goodness. On this basis, Gülen re-rationalizes and re-presents the humanitarian Sufi tradition in accordance with 'contemporary logos,' calling for consequent actions in the globalizing world. In particular, he presents dialogue between religions/civilizations/cultures based upon the humanitarian love as the solution to the contemporary human problems of mutual enmity and antagonism. To Gülen, through this

dialogic solution, one reaches to acknowledgment of others as equal beings not as anti-beings, and by this acknowledgment, he/she finds his/her own ‘true identity.’

These three aspects of organic interconnectivity have made Gülen’s Sufism a distinctive contribution to the resurgence of Sufism. With these aspects, Gülen’s Sufism has appealed to contemporary Turks, not only leading many of them to share his ideal, but also mobilizing a considerable number of them to be at the forefront of putting it into practice.

*The Gülen movement: From theory to practice*

In Gülen’s own definition, the Gülen movement is a movement run by people who not only share with his vision but also put their efforts forth to actualize it for *hizmet*. The examination of Chapter 5 painted a picture of Gülen’s Sufism as an embodied and embedded discipline in the movement - its members’ life, organizational structure and activities. I further suggested that this practical application of Sufism can be an intrinsic reason for the success of the movement as one of the most fast growing Islamic movements. Among many aspects of ‘practical Sufism,’ the following three points of correspondence between practical Sufism and the aforementioned three aspects of the interconnectivity of Gülen’s Sufism deserve to be restated.

Above all, Gülen’s teaching directs the members to lead interconnected lives in which faith and piety are internalized and externalized. Many of them are successful in this regard, following Gülen’s saintly life as a living example and his thought as a visionary guidance. Consequently, the embodied Sufi practices and virtues in Gülen’s life

and thought have acted as an intermediary between one's internalization and externalization of faith. Through such Sufi qualities as asceticism (*zuhd*), self-reflection (*muraqaba*) and self-evaluation (*muhasaba*), a member trains his/her carnal ego toward spiritual purification. This training further leads him/her to attain 'non-selfishness' and to realize an interdependent relationship between individual spirituality and collective *shakshi manawi*. Externalization of this inner ascetic piety makes its appearance in the members' voluntary and active participation in the movement's projects. This externalization in turn empowers members to internalize and thereby enrich their faith, securing a continuance of their voluntary activities. Because of this practical manifestation, the members are typically classified as "activist pietic ascetics" in the scholarship. As this term is assigned from the Weberian sociological schema, it denotes the communal dimension of Sufism as a social/shared experience. Yet, it is equally important to note that this term reveals the spiritual dimension of Sufism in a person's religiosity. Further, insofar as individually internalized Sufi qualities of pietism and asceticism are externalized through the Sufi virtues of non-selfishness and altruism for the communal activities of the movement for *hizmet*, one can note the popular pietistic dimension of Sufism. The embodiment of these three dimensions of Sufism in the members' personal and communal life has become the *eidetic* reason – in Husserlian term of phenomenology – for the success of the movement.

Second, the Gülen movement has evolved a suitable form for intermediating between and maximizing both a member's religiosity and *hizmet*. While its communal activities for *hizmet* secure a member's internalization and externalization of faith, one's embedded Sufi qualities of asceticism and altruism makes *hizmet* possible and best

performed. This reciprocity informed a new identity of the movement as a religious movement which directs numerous non-religious secular organizations. The movement is organically interconnected to its sub-organization in the sense that its activities are formalized and its goals are attained through its official sub-organizations. The two seemingly disparate entities, i.e., religious/informal and secular/official, have been distinctively harmonized in the movement. Although all formal organizations are independent units and promote themselves as such, they keep an organic relationship with the overarching movement at the single point and for the ultimate goal of *hizmet*. The relationship is lubricated by *istishara* (board-meeting), the primary decision-making system for all projects of the movement, which premises a shared feeling of *shakshi manawi* for the realization of *hizmet*. This organic relationship has resulted in solidification of the members' bond to the religious movement, strengthening their religiosity and leading the movement to be successful.

The form of the movement with its sub-organization is a quite new manifestation of Sufism, which makes an attempt to define it difficult. The primary difficulty lies in the reciprocity of the form between religious ideas and secular activities and its projection of traditional/national values into transnational visions. This dissertation suggests that although the movement is ideologically bond to the tradition through Gülen's Sufism, its form itself is 'new.' In other words, the form newly came out as a result of the practical application of the traditional view imposed by Gülen's Sufism to the contemporary context. This new and distinctive form has led scholars to define it with varying results. Although this dissertation did not exclusively deal with the issue of the identity of the movement, it has what the movement is *not*, which hint at what it is. Above all, the form

of the movement does not correspond to classical *tariqa*. It is observed that neither is Gülen perceived as a *murshid* (master) by the members who share ‘Sufism without Sufi orders’ nor does he guide his followers individually as his *murids* (disciples). Contrast to contemporary Naqshi movements in Turkey like one led by Mahmud Esad Cosan, which carries on the classical *silsila* (the spiritual chain) from the shaykh Gümüshanevi, the Gülen movement does not keep any *silsila*. Its members also do not exclusively practice Sufi rituals, as personal studies and/or communal activities for *hizmet* take precedence over practices like *dhikr*. Instead of focusing on spiritual growth through personal mystical experience, active participation in local *hizmet* activities is sought as a means to spiritual growth. In this regard, the movement departs not only from *tariqas* but also from the other Nurcu branches that, in Yavuz’s term, textual-based faith movements. Furthermore, in terms of its intrinsic link to the tradition through *shakshi manawi*, the Gülen movement is not a ‘neo’-*tariqa*: it also lacks the political characteristic of neo-*tariqa* movements, into which contemporary *tariqa*-affiliated political parties in Turkey can be rightly categorized. This enumeration of what the Gülen movement is not distinguishes its unique form. The chapters of this dissertation inclusively suggest that this new form can be better understood in a historical line of ‘early Turkish Sufis – saint cults – cultural Sufism – civil Islam,’ rather than viewed from a *tariqa*-centric interpretation of the history. This suggestion makes salient the Gülen movement as a manifestation not of institutionalized Sufism but of an embodied Sufism, that is, not as a revival of classical *tariqa* but as a contemporary manifestation of cultural Sufism. Such an embodiment of cultural Sufism is directly related to and reflected by the civic activities of the movement.

Third, to the members, *hizmet* specifically means cultural and civic activities. Here what is stressed by cultural activities is an exclusion of political engagements, but concentration instead on ‘civil initiatives’ which operate independently from the state apparatus and indifferently to economic or political interest for group or individual benefit. Such cultural-civic activities are performed by individual volunteer for public good. Within this sharing perspective of *hizmet*, the Gülen movement plans and carries out numerous civic-initiated projects and activities, all of which are run by the members’ contributions of time, labor and money. Therefore, to do *hizmet* necessitates virtues of self-sacrifice and altruism, and by doing *hizmet*, these virtues are internalized and deepened. In this regard, all the civil activities of the movement are elaborated for a two-fold purpose, to do service for humanity and to provide the members opportunities for spiritual growth. The primary activities in the fields of education and dialogue are found by the movement to best meet this purpose. Local communities, although scattered over the world but without exception, focus primarily on educational and dialogue activities and instrumentalize them as a core mechanism both for one’s ‘internalization and externalization’ of faith and for binding him/her communally to local *hizmet*. Local communities commonly have *dershanes* (student residence places) and *sohbet* (intimate conversation) meetings, which function as spaces for spiritual training, fosterage of religious/secular knowledge and promotion of socialization. Participation in voluntary educational and dialogue activities in *dershane*, *sohbet* meetings and other facilities enables a member to cultivate spiritual and moral values, advance socialization and enhance social skills. The virtues of asceticism and altruism that Gülen’s Sufism underlines are rationalized through personal self-reflection (*muraqaba*) and deepened in

the process of socialization. These virtues in turn make collective solidarity and actions for *hizmet* to be realized, and through collective actions, a member acquires a shared feeling of belonging and ‘togetherness.’ Further, this mutual sharing and communal bond is encouraged and codified by daily language extracted from Gülen’s thought and routinized in the discourse of the movement. This common language leads one to rethink, rediscover and regain national cultural identity. Significantly, as it is for Gülen, the term *hizmet* is specifically used in the circles of the Gülen movement in relation to *shakshi manawi* of Anatolian humanitarian heritage. In a sense, the daily usage of the term *hizmet* in and for all the activities of the movement is a constant reminder of national and cultural identity. This cultural identity is reflected by the members’ reconciliation with other national identities, creating ‘a glocal identity’ and enabling their *hizmet* activities to extend to the transnational level.

These three factors indicate the intrinsic reasons for the success of the movement. Put simply, they appear as and reflect the practical embeddedness and embodiment of Gülen’s Sufism, which appeals to the members with its distinctive interconnectivity. Through its organic and indispensable relationship with the movement, Gülen’s Sufism has been one of primary contributors to the revitalization of Sufism in the Turkish public spheres to an extent that it corresponds to and represents the global resurgence of Sufism. It specifically confirms changing modalities of Sufism in interaction with different contexts. That is the dynamic nature of Sufism, which resists the category of monolithic Sufism proposed by the orientalist, the fundamentalists and the decline theorists. The unique context of Turkey has informed the manifestation of Gülen’s Sufism distinctively, for instance, its stress on *shakshi manawi*. Along with its regional-oriented



distinctiveness, Gülen's Sufism interacts with a wider contemporary context of the globalizing world and manifests as a contemporary Sufism, transforming *shakshi manawi* of the Turkish Sufi tradition to *hizmet* for people of the world. Thus, as a contemporary manifestation, Gülen's Sufism as examined in this dissertation provides a useful understanding of the distinctive features which appeal within the contemporary world enough to allow Sufism to resurface.

## 6.2. Implications for the academic discourse on Sufism and Religion

My examination of the connections between Gülen and Sufism and my findings regarding the distinctive features of Gülen's Sufism have implications for the broader academic discourses on Sufism and religion in which this dissertation is situated. Studies of Gülen and his movement have often suggested the necessity of discussion on Gülen's idea of moderate Islam and his inspired civil movement as an alternative to political/militant Islam, and his vision of dialogue and its related activities of the movement as a possible solution to contemporary problems. My demonstration that Gülen's Sufism lies at the heart of these suggestions adds further implications specifically for contemporary Sufism with an emphasis on the meaning and role of religions.

First of all, Gülen's Sufism suggests (re)thinking the meaning of Sufism in contemporary Muslim life. A glimpse at the academic definitions of Sufism makes noticeable two separate but interconnected trends. Some scholars, mostly Western, tend to regard Sufism as a personal mystical experience, calling it 'Islamic mysticism.' Other scholars stress collective experience and social manifestation of Sufism in tariqas.

Spencer Trimingham's pioneering work, *The Sufi Orders in Islam*, has played a watershed role in a shift from the former to the latter, although the former still exists. Gülen's Sufism reveals neither such exclusive mysticism per se nor the communal experience in tariqas. The Sufism that Gülen conceptualizes and his followers embody means an Islamic spirituality that leads one to find inner meaningfulness in outer religious acts. In this type of Islamic spirituality, Sufism does not inform the Gülen movement with the alleged tariqa conceived as 'a refugee camp' or 'a tomb of elephants,' which, as Trimingham would argue, the members choose at their last moment in order to protect their religious identity against modernity. Instead, it informs the movement as a space, which constantly instills and refreshes Islamic spirituality in the members' lives for their interaction with modernity. As it has been little focused on by case studies, this quality of Sufism needs to be further examined through a holistic approach and especially by field studies of Muslim daily life in other Muslim countries.

Second, as Gülen's case of Turkish Sufism exemplifies, Sufism manifests diversely in tune with wide-ranging social, political and cultural conditions. In this sense, the concept of "regional religion," by which some scholars in Islamic studies indicate the diversity of Muslim societies as opposite to 'a narrowly-defined term of monolithic Islam,' is further stretched by the dynamicity of Sufi manifestations that suggest 'regional Sufism.' Not only does Gülen's concept of Turkish Sufism, but also the history of Sufism in Turkey substantiates this aspect. As I demonstrated in Chapter 2, in sharp contrast to a frequently imagined centrality of tariqas as the symbol of Sufism, Turkish Sufism has been shaped not just by its tariqa forms (dervish orders), but, far more importantly, by its spiritual and cultural heritage of tasawwuf (dervish culture). As particular evidence, I put

forward the existence of saint cults, which, apart from tariqas, played a significant role in disseminating of Sufism. Although they have received little attention in academia compared to tariqas due to their lower visibility, saint cults have long existed as a major manifestation of Sufism and functioned to make Sufism embedded in cultural areas. Owing to saint cults, tariqas and individual Sufis, Sufism was widely proliferated and deeply embedded into all areas to an extent that it became an inseparable element of Turkishness. In this sense, Gülen signifies Turkish Sufism as a cumulated cultural identity of Turkish *shakshi manawi*, and many historians depicts Turkish Sufism in a similar sense. Ahmet Yaşar Ocak, the leading historian in the field, represent them, pointing out the deep involvement of Sufism in all social areas and daily life during the Ottoman times.<sup>894</sup> This is to say that along with Islam, Sufism has constituted the religious identity of Turkishness, as it becomes an ordinary fact for Turks and represents itself as a way of life. From this perspective, an expression about the decline or the resurgence of Turkish Sufism would be inappropriate. In reality, the claimed decline of Sufism enforced by the Kemalist opposition refers more accurately to the dramatic shrink of tariqa-affiliated visible and social activities. In contrast, as in its past, Turkish Sufism has not lost its dominant place in the inner, religio-cultural lives of Turks. This renewed approach to Turkish Sufism raises not only a necessity for a reassessment of the academic trend that tends to assign the evolvement of Sufism exclusively to tariqa activities, but further an alarm over attempts to treat the diverse modalities of the decline and the resurgence of Sufism as a monolithic phenomenon. To an extent, this may invoke the

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<sup>894</sup> Ocak, "Introduction" to *Sufism and Sufis in Ottoman Society*, xv.

‘totalistic cultural relativism,’ which claims the impossibility of comparative studies. On the contrary, as Gülen empathetically puts it especially through his vision of dialogic Sufism, this suggestion necessitates comparative studies to figure out differences and commonalities between diverse entities so as to establish a dialogic bridge between them by acknowledging diversity in general and other features in particular.

As a part of dynamic Sufi manifestation, Turkish Sufism primarily functions as an identity provider and maintainer. More precisely, its specific contribution to the resolution of an individual ‘identity crisis’ is a possible contribution to a discussion on the topic of ‘Sufism and identity.’ In a wider academic discussion, the existentialist trend has concentrated on the issue of ‘crisis of meaning.’ Victor Frankl, a leading existential thinker, critically reassesses the dominant positivistic view of mechanical causality and points out that it does not satisfy man’s searching for ‘meaning.’ He proposes instead that a human being strives to find meaning and purpose, which acts as a basic motivational force for his/her life. Observing that man’s feeling of despair such as emptiness, boredom, valuelessness and meaninglessness has become ubiquitous today, Frankl conceptualizes this condition as the ‘existential vacuum.’ He further notes that religiousness remains unconscious, if not also repressed, in many people today, and the result is the sense of emptiness, meaninglessness and futility that is becoming increasingly evident.<sup>895</sup> This ‘existential vacuum’ is reflected worldwide in depression and suicide, in drug addiction and alcoholism and in destructive aggression.<sup>896</sup> In a consequent academic discussion, the

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<sup>895</sup> Victor Frankl, *Man’s Searching for Meaning: Revised and Updated* (New York: Washington Square Press., 1984), 121-23.

<sup>896</sup> David Wulff, *Psychology of Religion: Classic and Contemporary Views* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1991), 621.

term ‘crisis of meaning’ has been suggested, and ‘crisis of faith’ is considered as a primary factor of ‘crisis of meaning.’ In face of this currency, many religions turn back for providing relevant answers to the existential questions such as ‘what the meaning of being and life is,’ ‘from where we came and to where we are heading for,’ or ‘how we can save ourselves from the mechanized world.’ Meanwhile, religious traditions, which have long focused on the questions, gained more popularity. Among them is Sufism, which emphasizes a spiritually meaningful life in contrast to a materialized and monotonous lifestyle. By fortifying this task and representing it as such, Sufism has resurged in private sectors. Gülen’s Sufism provides a remarkable example for this aspect. All its core concepts such as *hizmet*, *shakshi manawi* and specifically “renunciation by heart, not physical severance” (*kalben terk, kesben deđil*) teach the essential need for a vertical dimension to God in one’s spiritual life and a horizontal relationship with society. As discussed in Chapter 5, this teaching has helped the members of the Gülen movement to respond to an ‘existential vacuum’ and to find meaningful answers to their questions about the purpose, direction and meaning of life. Beyond the detailed role of Gülen’s Sufism for regaining a national identity of Turkishness particularly within the global context, this existential role deserves scholarly attention and further research for what it might reveal about the vitality of Sufism and religion in a personal sphere.

Forth, despite caution against hasty generalizations especially in the framework of dynamic Sufism, all the preceding aspects - the meaning, manifestations and roles of Sufism as exemplified by Gülen’s Sufism - make it possible to speculate about the likely positive future of Sufism in Muslim life as well as in the Gülen movement. If Gülen’s

idea of Sufism and the majority of other Sufis alike – as opposed to a narrowly-confined Sufism with tariqas - are concerned, it is not hard to expect the vitality of Sufism, which would continue to play an important role as a spirituality of Muslim life. Bearing in mind that Turkish Sufism is an accumulated and inherited cultural identity throughout the history of Islam in Turkey, it is reasonable to expect that Sufism will remain an important part of Turkish life regardless of changing circumstances. Presumably, the hegemonic relationship between the tariqa-affiliated political parties and the secularist elites would affect the ups and downs of people's interest in Sufism. In its worst case, as once happened under Kemalist regime, social and political activities of Sufism might be seriously impacted, yet still Sufism itself would remain as a cultural lifestyle of Turks, as it has been so far. This worst case seems, however, unlikely to occur at least in the near future, when it is just as likely materialism would make people more thirsty for spirituality, western-centric globalization would intensify Turkishness as a counterweighted identity, and 'the clash of civilizations' would constantly remind one of Rumi, Emre and others alike. In this situation, it would more likely happen that Sufism would continually produce its new manifestations in and for interacting with changing conditions. This future is what Gülen's Sufism proposes. More specifically, Sufism in the Gülen movement proves that the vitality and continuity of Sufism lies in its dynamism, which enables Sufism to cope with a rapidly changing world, as the movement of 'Sufism without tariqa' shows. As it is inseparably involved in all aspects of the movement, Sufism in the movement would continue its function as the ideological foundation and as lifestyle, representing one of contemporary manifestations of Sufism and contributing to the spread of Sufism over the world. Its ideological, human, financial

and cultural sources, which come together within the embodied Sufi spirit of asceticism and altruism, exemplify the substance of Sufism in civic spheres independently of the state. Further, the rebirth of the movement as a worldwide movement based upon Gülen's vision of *hizmet* and humanitarian Sufism provides a case of global Sufism. Although this global manifestation has drawn the attention of recent academics, a further examination deserves to be made of the extent to which it is representative of a global Sufi manifestation and for a better understanding of transnational Sufi religiosity. As a characteristic of the global manifestation, this dissertation touched on the role of *shakshi manawi* as the source of glocal identity, with which the movement integrates into the world. This characteristic raises a question of how the 'local and global' entities are reconciled to consist of one glocal identity. Possibly, a tension between the two entities can be observed, and the problems that the tension creates and/or the process of its resolution can be relevantly monitored. In this regard, this dissertation suggests that the tension between the two entities in one glocal identity may well be related to the two founding concepts of *hizmet* and *shakshi manawi*. As examined, ideologically and ideally, the tension between these two seemingly conflicting concepts is resolved by Gülen's dialogic Sufism and its primacy of *hizmet* over *shakshi manawi*. Practically, according to the interview materials that this dissertation referred to, the members seem to successfully employ this ideological resolution in easing the strained relation of the two entities and concepts through actively participating in the educational and dialogic activities of the movement. Nevertheless, there is a certain lack of empirical studies on the members' lives, which makes it premature to estimate the validity of this view.

Further field examination on this issue is needed especially to assess the extent of the future of the movement as a global movement as well as of Sufism in the global context.

As indicated in all of these aspects, Gülen's Sufism provides several significant aspects for the discourse on religion in general. It amplifies 'a still living religion,' contrary to the modernist cliché image of religion as one 'dying out in bed, looking back on its golden age and praying for fatalistic paradise.' Religion does not simply breathe in the same air with people, but, as Gülen's Sufism further underlines, gives them an (if not *the*) air for their life. The followers of Gülen's Sufism suggests that religious values and norms involve imperatively in an individual life, giving the meaning, direction and purpose of life and motivating him/her to voluntarily participate in social service. In this way, religion provides a source of individual and common identity to its followers and creates bonds between them. Although Gülen's case is arguably exceptional, the manifestation of its "activist petic ascetics" shows the intrinsic link between religion and socio-economic activity. This example may be a useful instrument to illustrate how a religion organically forms an individual's daily life far beyond any causal relation between the two. In the framework of the existing academic disciplines, this is to say that religion appears in a human life as a synthesis of Jamesian personal/emotional experience, Weberian rational and social explanation, Durkheimian collective consciousness and Franklian 'meaning of life.' Further, Gülen's Sufism suggests that this role of religion as a source of human, social and cultural capital directs towards the collective well-being of humanity. In particular, Gülen's vision of interfaith/civilizational dialogue on the basis of humanitarian Sufism provides vision of religion as a solution to human problems in sharp contrast to the image of religion represented by religious fundamentalists and



theoretically legitimated by some scholars as a primary source of conflict and clash. The dialogue activities of the Gülen movement, which have attempted to put Gülen's dialogic vision into work over the world, proves the potential role of religion as a means of a dialogic bridge between people of different religious and cultural background. It also deserves to bear in mind that the activities of the movement are non-political and non-governmental activities, which are run by the members' petic-based voluntary contributions, fulfilled in the civic spheres and consumed for the collective well-being of humanity. In this sense, the movement in essence can be characterized as a 'religious-oriented civil movement,' which may provide a model for academic discussion on the development of social movements.

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