

TURKIC EDUCATORS AND STUDENTS BREAKING THEIR SILENCE:  
AN ORAL HISTORY OF A TANGLED WEB OF POLITICAL POWER

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TURKIC EDUCATORS AND STUDENTS BREAKING THEIR SILENCE:  
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University of Missouri-Kansas City, 2023

ABSTRACT

The social genocide of the Hizmet people by the Erdoğan regime has left an indelible mark on Turkic educators and students worldwide. The practice of genocide as a form of political control is steeped in the history of the Ottoman Empire and the Republic of Turkey and now the instrument of choice for the Erdoğan regime in a political shift toward authoritarianism. The educators and students whose voices were un-muted in this project represent counter-narratives to the government-controlled media representations of the Hizmet people and their roles in political influence are portrayed as terroristic threats. The purpose of this oral history was to illuminate the stories of Hizmet educators and students and their experiences of the social genocide of the Hizmet people within the milieu of Turkish tradition and culture. The approach was threefold: (1) to illuminate the evolution and emergence of Hizmet pedagogical practice couched in the context of 150 years of Turkish history from the period of the decline and fall of the Ottoman Empire to modern-day Türkiye; (2) to examine the juxtaposition of the Gülen movement philosophy on the pedagogical practice of Hizmet educators; and (3) to connect the stories of Hizmet educators, now teaching in the United States to pedagogical practices steeped in Turkic culture and tradition. This historical research provided an intimate glimpse into the lived experiences of educators and students who have been mischaracterized and victimized in a political genocide far beyond their control.

## APPROVAL PAGE

The faculty listed below, appointed by the Dean of the School of Graduate Studies, have examined a dissertation titled “Turkic Educators and Students Breaking Their Silence: An Oral History of a Tangled Web of Political Power” presented by Kari L. O’Rourke, candidate for the Doctor of Philosophy degree, and certify that in their opinion it is worthy of acceptance.

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It is hard to know where to begin to say how I feel about this project. One's story is the most personal possession an individual has, and it can never be taken away, however, it seems, attempts can be made to silence it. For me, this research endeavor has been about "unmuting" the story of the tragedy of a social genocide unfolding among educators, students and others in a country far away from my homeland at a time when it seems like something of this nature should not be possible. I would like to acknowledge and appreciate all of those who so bravely chose to share their stories, and those courageous individuals who advocate on behalf of those who have been silenced. Thank you from the depths of my soul for allowing me to make this journey with you. To the families of all those who have lost their lives in this genocide, I pray your pain and grief may heal and the voice of your loved ones never be forgotten.

It all began with a single cup of tea and a little curiosity. There is a Turkish proverb that says: "A single cup unites us for forty years" which can also be translated as "A cup of Turkish coffee has a forty-year memory" (Bir fincan kahvenin kirk yil hatiri vardir). Coffee or tea makes no difference; it's the time spent at the table that matters. I have often referred to myself as a "table extrovert;" I simply love the opportunity to meet new people and visit with old friends at gatherings around the table. Several years ago, I was invited to a Ramadan Iftar and, while sharing a cup of tea at a crowded table, one family told their story of how they arrived in my hometown. I was taken aback because I had no idea at the time this horrific situation was occurring in Turkey. Thank you to the Hizmet community for giving me this purpose and welcoming me into your inner circle so freely. Thank you to my partner,

Terri Handley, for seeing me through the many hours of writing, processing data and conducting Zoom interviews at odd hours of the day and night.

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I am especially grateful to the professors at the University of Missouri-Kansas City who guided me through the process of preparing and presenting this dissertation. I especially appreciate the guidance and support of committee member, Dr. Loyce Caruthers, who freely shared her wisdom, acted as a mentor, and encouraged me to complete my work throughout this process. I would like to acknowledge the work of my committee at the University of Missouri-Kansas City, especially Dr. Donna Davis, my committee chair, and Dr. Omiunota Ukpokodu, my co-chair, who provided valuable guidance and feedback. I also thank Dr. Candace Schlein for her insights on narrative research, and Dr. Marie McCarther who provided significant insight to strengthen my work.

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shared by each person in this historical research is deeply personal, and I have been humbled by the opportunity to process and present this data in a manner that represents voices unmuted. In addition, I would like to acknowledge the work of all of the volunteers at Advocates of Silenced Turkey, including Murat Kaval, Hafza Girdap, and Aslihan Kas; these individuals and a host of others embody the meaning of advocacy work. Finally, a special thanks to Mercan Kuloglu, Zeynep Ozcelik and the other young leaders who exude enthusiasm and passion for justice; I pray for their bright futures in a world free from oppression and inequity.

## DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate this work to the memories of my mother, Evelyn Marie (Huonker-O'Rourke) Fearn, and my grandmothers Margaret O'Rourke and Mary Elizabeth Huonker. Although they do not reside here on earth, their voices resonated with me throughout this entire process. My mother always had confidence in me and my abilities. I am looking forward to celebrating this achievement with her at the gravesite. Little did Grandma O'Rourke know that her Irish wisdom would provide that second kick of the mule and spur me on to this accomplishment. Grandma Huonker, in her quiet way, demonstrated fidelity, resilience and stamina to stay the course when the challenges seemed overwhelming.

These women, and many others in my life, taught me the value of unconditional love, never doubted me and always encouraged me along my journey. They also taught me the value of storytelling as a means of teaching life lessons, a gift I prize highly.

CHAPTER 1  
INTRODUCTION

When I was growing up in my Irish Catholic family, we had a Saint and a proverb for every occasion. My Confirmation Saint is Brigid of Kildare, and she is known to be the patroness of learning. I was often reminded of her guiding light in my life when I would have trouble following directions or successfully completing an assigned task. My grandmother said to me, on more than one occasion, “Kari Lynn, you know, the second kick of the mule is never educational....” My grandmother was a very wise woman; and I came to understand that when she said these words to me, I should take heed because she was cautioning me against repeating the error of my ways. As an author of historical research, I cannot dismiss my positionality— cultural heritage, identity, or religious background when I write about the past. I am a cisgender, white, Christian, lesbian, and U.S. Navy Veteran (1978-83) who adopted bi-racial twin sons when they were four and a half years old, investigating an Islamic genocide occurring in a country I have never visited. I am motivated in this research to reach beyond the limits and boundaries of my life in the Midwest of the United States to amplify the voice of justice for a group of people who have been harmed by what I believe to be an extremist political regime. My commitment to advocacy work originates in my Roman Catholic upbringing, my immersion in the Catholic Worker Community, and my current membership in the Episcopal church.<sup>1</sup> I cannot separate my sense of self and life experiences from crafting the words on the page which is now commonly understood in this form of

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<sup>1</sup> I am now considered an Apostate of the Roman Catholic church because I have rejected the exclusivity of the Roman Rite, and I am now a member of the Episcopal church. I Chair an Interfaith-Ecumenical committee at Grace and Holy Trinity Cathedral in Kansas City, Missouri. I professed the Vow of Non-Violence in the Catholic Worker community in 1991.

historical research.<sup>2</sup> The penning of the story originates in the oral narrative and is retold in the written word by me. My grandmother's words resonate with me as I think about the nature of history and the stories of Turkic<sup>3</sup> Hizmet educators and students couched in an environment of social genocide. Grandma would, undoubtedly, make the connection between what is happening now to the Hizmet people and what has happened in the past; and her words would ring true. I thought about how educators' experiences with social genocide shaped their pedagogical practices across the world as they fled Türkiye and established new lives. The Hizmet imprint on global education is indelible.

They say history repeats itself, but does it? In order to better understand the echoes of history, we must listen attentively to the stories being told by those who have lived it, and by those who previously paved the way for us to arrive where we are now. To address the reverberations of history relevant to Hizmet educators and students, I employed historical research through the use of oral histories and relevant supporting documents and archival materials.

The purpose of this oral history is to illuminate the stories of Hizmet educators and students within the milieu of Turkish history and their experiences of the social genocide of

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<sup>2</sup> Kate Blackwood, "First-Person Histories Reframe the Past," *Cornell Chronicle*, February 3, 2023, <https://news.cornell.edu/stories/2023/02/first-person-histories-reframe-past#:~:text=Historians%20were%20to%20be%20as,they%20write%20about%20the%20past>.

<sup>3</sup> **Turkic** vs. **Turkish** – "Turkic" is an ethnic identity and family of languages originating from the same source. This particular source was a nomadic group dating back an estimated three millennium to the region in south central Asia eventually inhabited by the Ottomans. The Turkic peoples are an ethno-linguistic grouping of population who share ancestry mythology, history and culture and whose reach extends beyond the national borders of Türkiye. "Turkish" refers to both people from Türkiye and the Turkish or Türkçesi language. Peter B. Golden, "An Introduction to the History of the Turkic Peoples," *Ethnogenesis and State-Formation in Medieval and Early Modern Eurasia and the Middle East* (1992): 127-136.



the Hizmet people. The Hizmet people are followers of the Gülen Movement whose founder is Fethullah Gülen, a prominent Turkish Imam and Islamic scholar.<sup>4</sup> Social genocide, in this context, can be rudimentarily understood to mean the eradication and political silencing of a group of people based on their affiliation with a civil society movement enmeshed in religious and cultural beliefs.<sup>5</sup> In the case of the Hizmet people, many of the victims of this social genocide are educators and students which has resulted in profound and long-term consequences to academia worldwide both at the macro and micro levels. One such example of the macro impact is included in Chapter Four in the section entitled “Academics for Peace Petition” wherein 1,128 academicians were summarily removed from their positions in higher education, many were charged and detained for their role in protesting the unfair treatment of the Kurdish people, an ethnic minority group in south-central Türkiye. The loss of more than 1,128 professors to higher education combined with the closing of schools and universities throughout the country and abroad, as discussed in Chapter Three, will have an extensive ripple effect for education globally for many years to come. Both Ub and EEK were caught in the web of educators terminated and charged in incidents related to government quashing of academic freedom and expression. The students interviewed in this historical research are represented by Ali as a graduate student who was imprisoned for meeting with his advisor, Bre a student whose university was closed and her records erased,

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<sup>4</sup> Sabine Dreher, "What Is the Hizmet Movement? Contending Approaches to the Analysis of Religious Activists in World Politics," *Sociology of Islam* 1, no. 3-4 (2014): 257-275. Gülen now resides in exile in Pennsylvania, USA. Helen Rose Ebaugh, *The Gülen Movement: A Sociological Analysis of a Civic Movement Rooted in Moderate Islam* (Springer Science & Business Media, 2009).

<sup>5</sup> Further discussion of the definition of genocide is included in Chapter 2 “Genocide in Historical Context” and Chapter 3 “Who are the ‘Hizmet People’.”

and the students on the Bosphorus Bridge, Furkan and Ragip. The students who survived the Bosphorus Bridge incident received life sentences in prison for following the orders of their military unit commanders; their stories are illustrated in Chapter Five.

The approach to this historical research is threefold: (1) to illuminate the evolution and emergence of Hizmet pedagogical practice couched in the context of 150 years of Turkish history from the period of the decline and fall of the Ottoman Empire to modern-day Türkiye; (2) to examine the juxtaposition of the Gülen movement philosophy on the pedagogical practice of Hizmet educators; and (3) to connect the stories of Hizmet educators, now teaching in the United States to pedagogical practices steeped in Turkic culture and tradition.<sup>6</sup> Yildiz describes Hizmet movement teachers as “working like diplomats overseas” in an attempt to describe how these educators seek to “build peace bridges” through their education efforts while representing the best of Turkic culture abroad.<sup>7</sup>

In the following section, I present the scope and methodology in addition to the research question and rationale followed by an in-depth discussion of historical research and the nature of historical facts, which lays the framework for oral history as a method of data collection. The case for historical research provides a context for constructing the stories of Hizmet educators and students within the social genocide that occurred in Türkiye and the positionality of dominance of a government constructed to silence voices of dissent, by death if deemed necessary. Stories of students, human rights advocates and victims of the Hizmet

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<sup>6</sup> Thomas Michel, *Peace and Dialogue in a Plural Society: Contributions of the Hizmet Movement at a Time of Global Tensions* (Clifton, NJ: Blue Dome Press, 2014); Muhammed M. Akdag, "The Roots of Fethullah Gülen's Theory of Education and the Role of the Educator," *Hizmet Studies Review* 2, no. 3 (Spring 2015): 55-70.

<sup>7</sup> Yunus Yildiz, and Serdar Dayan, "A Tiny Look at Hizmet (Service) Movement Teachers' Diplomatic Mission," *International Journal of Social Science Research and Review* 5, no. 6 (2022): 188.

genocide, who have un-muted their voices, are coupled with the voices of educators to lend to the nature of truth in this historical research. I end the chapter with an overview of succeeding chapters.

### **Scope and Methodology**

From an interdisciplinary perspective, this dissertation merges the historical foundation of educational leadership and policy with pedagogical practice. The scope of this research aims to illuminate events of the past that have shaped public education in Türkiye and contrast these events with contemporary issues of an educational nature in both Türkiye and the United States (U.S.). These issues include an awareness of the scale and magnitude of the elimination of schools and universities; and the loss of educators, especially in higher education, throughout Türkiye and affiliated international Hizmet schools where the Erdoğan regime has political influence. Because this genocide is ongoing in 2023, we do not yet know the full impact to the global education system, but it is within reason to predict the ripple effect of the loss will have a measurable outcome.

The method of this pursuit is grounded in a form of storytelling derived from the oral histories of Hizmet educators and students. In addition, family members of deceased victims of the social genocide of the Hizmet people have provided a historical record for those whose lives were lost within Türkiye. History can be viewed from many perspectives and, in the end, what we have is a story that retells events which have occurred in the past in such a way as to be believed by the listener.<sup>8</sup> Validity in historical research, or “actual truths,” is difficult to establish, and the researcher must focus on the quality of the evidence to support events

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<sup>8</sup> Hayden V. White, "The Burden of History," *History and Theory* 5, no. 2 (1966): 111-134.

through a lens that is both objective and informed.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, I have incorporated documents and artifacts from primary sources of historical information related to education in Türkiye and the experiences of Hizmet educators in the U.S. These sources include oral histories as told by five Hizmet educators teaching in a U.S. charter school system, three refugee students who survived the social genocide of the Hizmet people, and three educator survivors who were charged, detained, released and remain in Türkiye. I have also integrated memoirs from the Un-Muted Exhibit, which document the stories of victims, as told by their families and close friends, who did not survive either the torture and imprisonment within Türkiye or their attempts to flee and seek asylum in refuge countries. In some instances, the oral histories, memoirs and documents were translated from Turkish to English by members of the Hizmet community who are fluent in both Turkish and English languages. These translations were corroborated by a qualified interpreter.<sup>10</sup> Additional primary sources of data were news and social media posts, transcripts of interviews, and photographs of artifacts from family members of victims of the genocide. Secondary sources of data, journal articles and books, were supportive corroboration of the oral histories and other primary sources.

### **Research Question and Rationale**

The following question informed and guided this historical research:

What influenced the development of Hizmet education, in Türkiye and abroad, between the years 1970 and 2023?

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<sup>9</sup> “Evidence Explained: Historical Analysis, Citations & Source Usage,” *A Basic Vocabulary for Historical Research*. September 2014, <https://www.evidenceexplained.com/quicktips/basic-vocabulary-historical-research>.

<sup>10</sup> The translations have been verified by Eyyup Esen, PhD, for accuracy. Doctor Esen’s Curriculum Vitae is included in Appendix C.

This question provided the structure for the integration of oral history and the shaping of historical context that stimulated the development of pedagogical practices of Hizmet educators. In other words, it forms the foundation of the inquiry and encompasses a broad view of the evolution of pedagogy within Turkish education and the Gülen Movement from which Hizmet education flows. Significant to the research question and rationale is the conflict between the Erdoğan regime and Gülen Movement followers which has given way to a form of social genocide aimed at eliminating dissent in the political milieu of the country, Türkiye.<sup>11</sup>

These events have been the catalyst that have forced a migration of Turkish Hizmet educators and students to countries of safe harbor, which include the U.S. I illustrated the alignment and/or the discord between the ideal of Gülen Movement pedagogical practice and the lived experiences of Hizmet educators. Although each story told is unique, clear, and resounding; collectively the voices reveal many facets of interesting detail about educators committed to their craft and vocation set within Turkish history and culture.<sup>12</sup> The context for this inquiry was focused on political and historical events within Türkiye that have shaped the modernization of its education system, and Hizmet educators' experiences of new and challenging cultural and religious expressions that involve adapting to U.S. educational environments.

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<sup>11</sup> Fait Muedini, "The Politics Between the Justice and Development Party (AKP) and the Gülen Movement in Turkey: Issues of Human Rights and Rising Authoritarianism," *Muslim World Journal of Human Rights* 12, no. 1 (2015): 99-122.

<sup>12</sup> Volkan Cicek, Riza Ulker, and Bulent Tarman, "Comparison of Character Education in US and Turkish Educational Systems: Globalizing American Education System," *Energy Education Science and Technology Part B: Social and Educational Studies* 4, no. 3 (2012): 1311-1322.

Summarily, the rationale for this historical research question is to evoke a sense of informed debate over issues revealed within the stories as told by Hizmet educators; as such, I have endeavored to objectively present the information from multiple perspectives. The stories provided herein offered a counter-narrative to the dominant paradigm presented in the official historical record of the social genocide of the Hizmet people.

### **Historical Research**

The goal of historical research is to “aid in the assimilation of history to a higher kind of intellectual inquiry.”<sup>13</sup> Through the lens of history, patterns of perceived successes and failures become apparent relative to varying locus of control pivots. For example, such a pivot occurred in the Turkish education system when the Republic of Turkey was formed, and the curriculum shifted from a faith-based Qur’anic emphasis to a focus on science and arts that secularized education.<sup>14</sup> The proclamation of the Republic in 1923 included a law that placed all educational institutions, except Istanbul University, under the Ministry of Education. In the 1920s the Latin (also known as the Roman) alphabet was adapted as the standard for the written word in Turkish language, and children were required by law to attend primary schools.<sup>15</sup> Hence, to tell the stories of Hizmet educators, it is important to understand the nature of historical facts surrounding the influence the Ministry of Education had on the formation of Turkish curriculum and educational standards in the Republic.

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<sup>13</sup> Hayden V. White, "The Burden of History," *History and Theory* 5, no. 2 (1966): 111-134.

<sup>14</sup> Feroz Ahmad, "Politics and Islam in Modern Turkey," *Middle Eastern Studies* 27, no. 1 (1991): 3-21.

<sup>15</sup> Unification of Education Act, Law No 430/1924, in Zeynep Varli, "The Structure of the Turkish Educational System," *Practice and Theory in Systems of Education* 3, no. 2 (2008): 95-103.

## Historical Facts

Historical *facts* are probably more closely aligned with fiction, or at the very least, only part of the whole story. Moses described these phenomena as *definitional imprecisions* that preclude scientific certitude.<sup>16</sup> Certitude and truth in historical narrative are conceptually elusive because the report of the event is objectively relativistic.<sup>17</sup> History is a story told about past events and is purported to reveal *facts* surrounding events, but does such a thing exist? Historical facts are statements about events, in turn, historical research seeks an “affirmation of the fact that something is true.”<sup>18</sup> Thus, historical facts are the result of historical research which seeks to chronicle and explain the past and historical narrative is the story told.<sup>19</sup>

In oral history narrative, the experiences of the storyteller are significant to the event. The reality is historical facts are relative to the position and perspective of the one relaying the details of an event that has occurred at some point in the past. “The act of perception is now seen by many inquirers as a transaction between a subject and an object. The beauty of an apple is not in the eye of the beholder, as they say, but is rather a function of his (the beholder’s) past experience, the present perceiving situation, and the apple.”<sup>20</sup> One means of

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<sup>16</sup> A. Dirk Moses, "Genocide and Modernity," in *The Historiography of Genocide*, ed. Dan Stone (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008): 156-193.

<sup>17</sup> Carl F. Kaestle, "Standards of Evidence in Historical Research: How Do We Know When We Know?" *History of Education Quarterly* 32, no. 3 (1992): 361-366.

<sup>18</sup> Carl L. Becker, "What Are Historical Facts?" *The Western Political Quarterly* 8, no. 3 (1955): 327-340.

<sup>19</sup> Kate Rousmaniere, "Historical Research," in *Foundations for Research: Methods of Inquiry in Education and the Social Sciences*, ed. Kathleen B. deMarrais and Stephen D. Lapan (Routledge, 2003): 31-50.

<sup>20</sup> Ken Macrorie, "The Objectivity-Subjectivity Trap," *The Antioch Review* 24, no. 4 (1964): 481.

including objectivity in historical research is to critically evaluate multiple versions of historical narratives in such a manner as to seek the expression of the voices within the text and those missing from the text. This approach presents an opportunity for greater value in the contribution of the narrative to a more objective portrait of the event described. Contrary to this view, Becker in his assessment of the facts of history maintains there is no such thing as a “historical fact” because differing perspectives of the same event can be true even when they often paint very different pictures as described in the following:

...the facts of history come in the end to seem something solid, something substantial like physical matter... such are the common connotations of the words historical facts, as used by historians and other people...is historical fact really as hard and stable as it is often supposed to be... Thus, the simple fact is to be not a simple fact at all. It is the statement that is simple generalization of a thousand and one facts... (a fact is) only a symbol, a simple statement which is a generalization of a thousand and one simpler facts which we do not for the moment care to use, and this generalization itself we cannot use apart from the wider facts and generalizations which it symbolizes.<sup>21</sup>

Research in history can be confusing because time never stops moving forward; therefore, the moment an event occurs it, by the nature of time, becomes an historical event which makes the event intangible because we can never go back to that moment in time.

The techniques used to conduct historical research are defined by the term historiography that involves specific language to describe events. For example, we say it *is* a historical fact, not it *was* a historical fact; but it *was* an actual event, not it *is* an event as if it is occurring now. Kate Rousmaniere, a professor in the Department of Educational Leadership at Miami University, Ohio, and a historian of American education, adds another

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<sup>21</sup> Carl L. Becker, "What Are Historical Facts?" *The Western Political Quarterly* 8, no. 3 (1955): 327-340.



layer of understanding to the definition of historical fact because, as she explains, the one writing the text is always viewing the event from their own perspective:

...history is interpretation of the past, drawing on available sources, and it is the historian who does the interpretation. In a very real sense, there is no history until historians tell it, and it is the way in which they tell it that becomes what we know of as history. The radical historian Howard Zinn (1989) argued that historians write from their own subjective experience and perspective about the world. It's not that historians make outright lies about the past, but that they omit or deemphasize some data over others, and the definition of what is important depends on each historian's values.<sup>22</sup>

Carl Becker, who was once a professor at the University of Kansas (1902 to 1916), grappled with the issue of conceptually defining *fact* within the context of historical events.

Rousmaniere and Becker arrive at the same inference with regard to the subjectivity and positionality of the narrative storyteller of historical research. Although Becker did not employ the term *positionality*, his description of was also clearly focused on the motivations of the one telling the story:

...by no possibility can the historian make affirmations describing all of all of the facts, -- all of the acts, thoughts, emotions of all of the persons who contributed to the actual event in its entirety. One historian will therefore necessarily choose certain affirmations about the event, and relate them in a certain way, rejecting other affirmations and other ways of relating them. Another historian will necessarily make a different choice. Why? What is it that leads one historian to make, out of all the possible true affirmations about the given event, certain affirmations and not others? Why, the purpose he [they have] has in his mind [their minds] will determine that. And so, the purpose he [historians have in their minds] has in his mind will determine the precise meaning which he [they derive] derives from the event. The event itself, the facts, do not say anything, do not impose any meaning. It is the historian who speaks, who imposes a meaning.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Kate Rousmaniere, "Historical Research," in *Foundations for Research: Methods of Inquiry in Education and the Social Sciences*, ed. Kathleen B. deMarrais and Stephen D. Lapan (Routledge, 2003): 32.

<sup>23</sup> Carl L. Becker, "What Are Historical Facts?" *The Western Political Quarterly* 8, no. 3 (1955): 335.

To sum up this analysis, the process of collecting oral histories involves evoking the memories of the storytellers. Each story told is given by the narrator and spans some measure of time following the event described.

### **Oral History as a Method of Data Collection**

One's memory and the recanting of those thoughts are very interesting matters. "Memory (the deliberate act of remembering) is a form of willed creation. It is not an effort to find out the way it really was – that is research. The point is to dwell on the way it appeared and why it appeared in that way... Memory, then, no matter how small the piece, demands my respect, my attention, and my trust."<sup>24</sup> This gathering of oral history data is "the opening of narrative space" in which the story told is the subject's truth.<sup>25</sup> The narrative space gives way to the edited and contextualized written story as interpreted by the author. The work of the author is "to transform talk into print with a measure of integrity."<sup>26</sup> The Prologue to the Rule of Saint Benedict urges each of us to "listen with the ear of the heart."<sup>27</sup> This phrase is often also translated as "incline the ear of your heart to the instruction you are about to receive" and was a favorite theme my Irish Catholic Grandmother would use when she taught me lessons. A teacher in the oral tradition, my grandmother imparted her wisdom to me when I was a child through storytelling. The oral histories presented in this work are deeply tender and passionately close to the hearts of each of the narrators, and I have made

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<sup>24</sup> Toni Morrison, "Memory, Creation, and Writing," *Thought* 59, no. 235 (1984): 385-390.

<sup>25</sup> Alessandro Portelli, "Living Voices: The Oral History Interview as Dialogue and Experience," *The Oral History Review* (2019): 239-248.

<sup>26</sup> Linda Shopes, "Editing Oral History for Publication," *Oral History Forum d'histoire orale*, 31 (2011): 3.

<sup>27</sup> Saint Benedict (Abbot of Monte Cassino), and Timothy Fry, *RB 1980: The Rule of St. Benedict in English* (Collegeville, MN Liturgical Press, 1982).

every attempt to both listen with the ear of my heart and write with the storyteller's voice in the shaping of the narrative. The interviews that opened this narrative space for each of the contributors were conducted through dialogue and often required the assistance of language interpreters, as previously noted. The conversion of these sacred stories into printed form have been, to every extent possible, carefully and respectfully presented in this historical research.

In many of the stories, the oral history narrative conflicts with the authorized official record of the government-controlled media within Türkiye. Shopes refers to this type of counter-narrative as having the ability to democratize the historic record.<sup>28</sup> In other words, these stories are often the voice of individuals and groups muted by the dominance of political power, presence and influence in the public record which makes a strong case for historical research.

### **The Case for Historical Research**

At the turn of the twentieth century, there was a good bit of debate among scholars as to the validity of history as a science, in part, because it was recorded from the position of dominance. "To the victor belong the spoils of the enemy" is a phrase commonly used in a culture of dominance.<sup>29</sup> Figure 1.1 is the magazine cover of Harper's Weekly depicting William Marcy's quote.

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<sup>28</sup> Linda Shopes, "Editing Oral History for Publication," *Oral History Forum d'histoire orale*, 31 (2011): 3.

<sup>29</sup> This quote is attributed to William Marcy, a New York politician, who was speaking in the Senate in 1832 regarding Martin Van Buren's appointment as Minister to England. However, it is likely he was repeating a colloquial idiom of the day derived from a Latin phrase *victori sunt spolia* which was common among Roman soldiers. It was later depicted in a political cartoon in *Harper's Weekly* as *In Memoriam—Our Civil Service as It Was*, April, 28, 1877, page 325, LC-USZ62-89864.



Figure 1-1: Political Commentary from Harper's Weekly, April 28, 1877

The privilege of writing the details of said victory in the books of relative truth is known as history. The stories that have been told about what has happened in the past, until recently, were told from a position of dominance. The difference between “then and now” is the introduction of the Internet and the availability of electronic recording media which allows for events to be recorded with a higher degree of autonomy. The positionality of dominance creates a sense of skepticism in our understanding of what has happened in history because we are left wondering what is missing from the story. It leaves us wondering what those voices that are missing from the story would have to say about how historic events actually occurred.

In Turkish history, the texts appear to tell a different story than what is commonly believed to be true from American and European perspectives.<sup>30</sup> For example, the Ottoman Empire allied itself with Germany and Austria-Hungary in World War I; and although Ottomans had good reason for this decision, they were not on the side of victory. Indeed, the Ottomans were decimated by the war which inflicted one of the final blows to the Empire and gave way to the rise of the Turkish Republic.<sup>31</sup> What is taught in Turkish schools about that war is quite different from what Westerners believe to be true about those same events.<sup>32</sup> My analysis focuses on the positionality of the storyteller; in other words, describing how dominance appears to have bent the truth to portray events in a positive light regardless of what really may or may not have happened; and how this perspective influenced pedagogy in Turkish education. Kliebard is instrumental for understanding the nature of curriculum pedagogy and dominance. He portends that “curriculum in any time and place becomes the site of a battleground where the fight is over whose values and beliefs will achieve the legitimation and the respect that acceptance into the national discourse provides”<sup>33</sup> Turkish educators have engaged in battle with political forces throughout the history of the Republic to ensure pedagogical alignment with national values and beliefs. These ideals are contextualized and described in greater detail in subsequent chapters; however, one example

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<sup>30</sup> Dilaver Arıkan Açar, and İnan Rüma. "External Pressure and Turkish Discourse on 'Recognition of the Armenian Genocide'," *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 7, no. 3 (2007): 449-465.

<sup>31</sup> Vahakn N. Dadrian, "The Documentation of the World War I Armenian Massacres in the Proceedings of the Turkish Military Tribunal," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 23, no. 4 (1991): 549-576.

<sup>32</sup> E. Fuat Keyman, "Modernity, Secularism and Islam: The Case of Turkey," *Theory, Culture & Society* 24, no. 2 (2007): 215-234.

<sup>33</sup> Herbert M. Kliebard, *The Struggle for the American Curriculum*. 2nd ed. New York: Routledge, 1995.

of the struggle is exemplified in the discourse over genocides that have occurred within their history.

In Türkiye, the internationally recognized “Armenian Genocide” is referred to as the “Armenian Allegations” and is a taboo of discussion.<sup>34</sup> It is believed, the Armenians were singled out at the outset of World War I (WWI) because of their ethnic, cultural and religious beliefs.<sup>35</sup> During WWI, the Young Turks, a nationalist group within the Ottoman Empire, sided with the Germans in an anti-Russian assault. In so doing, they forced the Armenians into labor battalions where they were worked to death or killed outright as a part of the war effort. The remaining Armenians, those unable to join the war effort, were deported through a nearly impassible desert region and then attacked by Turkish and Kurdish killing squads.<sup>36</sup>

The Kurds once fought alongside the Turks as members of the Ottoman Empire in WWI. However, the two ethnic groups are distinctive and often oppose each other in territorial disputes. Since the formation of the Republic of Turkey and the establishment of the border between Türkiye and Syria, the Kurdish people have found themselves in a precarious position. The Kurds are tribal and occupy mountainous territories in Türkiye,

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<sup>34</sup> Dilaver Arıkan Açar, and İnan Rüma. "External Pressure and Turkish Discourse on 'Recognition of the Armenian Genocide'," *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 7, no. 3 (2007): 449-465.

<sup>35</sup> Peter Balakian, "Raphael Lemkin, Cultural Destruction, and the Armenian Genocide," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 27, no. 1 (2013): 57-89.

<sup>36</sup> Robert Melson, "Paradigms of Genocide: The Holocaust, the Armenian Genocide, and Contemporary Mass Destructions," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 548, no. 1 (1996): 156-168.

Syria, Iraq and Iran.<sup>37</sup> By some estimates the Kurdish people have been present in the region for more than 3,000 years.<sup>38</sup>

In 2007, the United Nations (UN) adopted the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) which included recognition of the indigenous peoples of North America but failed to specifically reference the Kurdish people.<sup>39</sup> The Kurdish people are considered both “transnational” and “indigenous” because they occupy more than one country and have been present and functioning in a tribal manner since before the formation of the nations where they are present.<sup>40</sup>

Since the Ottoman period, the Kurds have been subjected to political attempts to eradicate their presence within the four countries they occupy in the region which was once part of the Ottoman Empire wherein the Young Turks sought to exterminate the Kurds.<sup>41</sup> The genocide continued through the period of the Turkish Republic, and in 1971 leaders of the separatist movement were imprisoned by the Turkish military because explicitly Kurdish

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<sup>37</sup> James L. Crawford, "The Continued Persecution of the Kurdish People in Turkey," *American Indian Law Review* 45, no. 2 (2020).

<sup>38</sup> Crawford, "The Continued Persecution of the Kurdish People in Turkey."

<sup>39</sup> United Nations General Assembly, "United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples," (New York, 2007): 1-18. Note: Efforts have since been made to include the Kurdish people in the definition of “indigenous people” and thus afford them the protection if the United Nations.

<sup>40</sup> Ipek Demir, “Kurdish Transnational Indigeneity,” in *The Cambridge History of Kurds*, Hamit Bozarslan, Cengiz Gunes, and Veli Yadirgi, eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2021): 829-847.

<sup>41</sup> Dominik J. Schaller, and Jürgen Zimmerer. "Late Ottoman Genocides: The Dissolution of the Ottoman Empire and Young Turkish Population and Extermination Policies—Introduction," *Journal of Genocide Research*, 10, no.1 (2008): 7-14.

societies had long-standing been declared illegal.<sup>42</sup> This experience of the Kurds is eerily similar to that of Indigenous Americans<sup>43</sup> wherein Manifest Destiny eradicated massive numbers of people and cultures within the North American continent.<sup>44</sup>

The common denominator in the Turkish culture is conceptually an absolute dominance of a political ideology or a religious belief system that uses force to dominate and legitimize human rights violations.<sup>45</sup> One effective means of control is through nationalist indoctrination in the education system. For example, a discussion of Darwin is not likely to be found in a Turkish high school text book because evolution is inconsistent with fundamental Islamic belief in creation. This is connected to nationalism in that Türkiye is purported to be a secular state, however, the Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (AKP)<sup>46</sup> in Türkiye introduced Islamic rule back into government which Kandiyoti refers to as “undisguised efforts at indoctrination into a new official ideology.”<sup>47</sup> Thus, the voice of domination permeates public school curriculum in seemingly benign ways, and the tragedy appears to be that Türkiye lacks the political will or interest to eliminate it from the texts. Within Turkish

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<sup>42</sup> Joane Nagel, "The Conditions of Ethnic Separatism: The Kurds in Turkey, Iran, and Iraq," (paper presented at the Seventy-Third Annual Meeting of the American Sociological Association, September 1978).

<sup>43</sup> In using the term “Indigenous Americans” I am specifically referring to the people who were members of Native Nations that were pushed out of what is now the United States by colonizers, and were victims of colonizing genocide under the auspices of Manifest Destiny.

<sup>44</sup> Brenden Rensink, "Genocide of Native Americans: Historical Facts and Historiographic Debates," in *Genocide of Indigenous Peoples* (Routledge, 2017): 15-36.

<sup>45</sup> Mehmet Caman, “Authoritarianization and Human Rights in Turkey: How the AKP Legitimizes Human Rights Violations,” *Human Rights in Turkey: Assaults on Human Dignity* (2021): 179-197.

<sup>46</sup> Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (AKP) in Türkiye, when translated to English, means the “Justice and Development Party. Erdoğan is the Chairperson of the AKP political party.

<sup>47</sup> Deniz Kandiyoti, and Zühre Emanet, "Education as Battleground: The Capture of Minds in Turkey," *Globalizations* 14, no. 6 (2017): 874.



curriculum, the narrative of national identity established in textbooks is based on an essentialist and exclusivist history of the Turks.

Allusions to a historical pre-national identity refer to the origins of today's Turks in the Turkic people of Central Asia. The Turkish perspective is to argue that while other civilizations were 'backward,' the Turkic peoples were 'civilized,' and therefore superior in every way, including the idea of possessing a warrior-like-status throughout history. National identity as presented in textbooks ignores all that is different from dominant Turkish and Muslim identity.<sup>48</sup>

The sense of nationalism is not exclusive to Turkey, but it is always viewed from the view of the dominant voice in the governance of the nation. Parallels can be drawn between Turkish and American views of Nationalism which permeate the texts and how history is taught in the classroom.<sup>49</sup>

It would be rather easy for someone in the U.S. to ignore Türkiye's practice of criminalizing components of education and write it off as just another example of the perception that other countries are not as sophisticated as the education system in the U.S. However, something similar is happening in the United States at this time (2023). There is a plethora of anti-Critical Race Theory (CRT) legislation afoot in various state governments.<sup>50</sup> The rationale for these political maneuvers is that CRT is changing U.S. history and it would

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<sup>48</sup> Tahir Abbas, and Anja Zalta, "‘You Cannot Talk about Academic Freedom in Such an Oppressive Environment’: Perceptions of the We Will Not Be a Party to This Crime! Petition Signatories," *Turkish Studies* 18, no. 4 (2017): 624-643.

<sup>49</sup> Volkan Cicek, Riza Ulker, and Bulent Tarman, "Comparison of Character Education in US and Turkish Educational Systems: Globalizing American Education System." *Energy Education Science and Technology Part B: Social and Educational Studies* 4, no. 3 (2012): 1311-1322.

<sup>50</sup> Miller, Vanessa, Frank Fernandez, and Neal H. Hutchins, "The Race to Ban Race: Legal and Critical Arguments Against State Legislation to Ban Critical Race Theory in Higher Education," *Missouri Law Review* 88, no. 1 (2023): 61-106.

confuse students if history were to be told in a more complete or different form.<sup>51</sup> This is a disguise for the presence of the voice of white dominance in American history and culture. America's collective resistance to change pushes public education through pendulous upheavals only to return to systems embedded in the preservation of white dominance.<sup>52</sup>

White supremacy takes on multiple forms; and its presence, in some fashion, comprises contemporary and historic American culture since colonization. The influence of white dominance is apparent in all aspects of contemporary American society and its history. The conquerors of this land were white and enslaved Africans through the slave trade. The slaves from Africa, who became known as African Americans in the late 20th century, were considered sub-human and not afforded the rights of their dominators. The indigenous people of this land were eradicated from the landscape either by death or forced encampment in reservations. "...one cannot fully understand the existence of racism and racial inequality without paying close attention to the formation and maintenance of white racial identity."<sup>53</sup> I submit that this white racial identity is the face of dominance and an affront to the true realization of democracy.

CRT is a framework designed to inspire and encourage all people to take a more realistic and open-minded view of how race has been socially constructed as a means to

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<sup>51</sup> Rayshawn Ray and Alexandra Gibbons, "Why Are States Banning Critical Race Theory?" Brookings Institute. November 2021, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/fixgov/2021/07/02/why-are-states-banning-critical-race-theory/>.

<sup>52</sup> Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness* (New York: The New York Press, 2012).

<sup>53</sup> Monica McDermott, and Frank L. Samson. "White Racial and Ethnic Identity in the United States," *Annual Review of Sociology* 31 (2005): 245-261.

ensure the authority of white dominance.<sup>54</sup> A core premise of CRT is that racism is endemic, institutional, and systematic; racism is not an aberration but rather a fundamental way of organizing society which makes it exceedingly difficult to identify and address issues surrounding the paradigm.<sup>55</sup>

Discussions of white dominance are difficult to have because they are engrained in every aspect of our daily lives. “To interrupt white fragility, we need to build our capacity to sustain the discomfort of not knowing, the discomfort of being unmoored, the discomfort of racial humility.”<sup>56</sup> One way to approach the subject of dominance is to examine more closely what has happened in other countries where extreme forms of domination have occurred in the past. By examining these events in countries such as Türkiye, we can more closely examine and better understand current situations in the United States. Such examples in Türkiye include, what many consider an assault on academic freedom wherein academicians have been censured and historical topics are taboo and forbidden. Events such as the Armenian genocide cannot be discussed without fear of criminal prosecution and expressions of political dissent are considered acts of terrorism. These topics are discussed in greater

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<sup>54</sup> Robin DiAngelo, *White Fragility: Why It's So Hard to Talk to White People about Racism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2018): 14; Daniel G. Solorzano and Dolores Delgado Bernal, "Examining Transformational Resistance Through a Critical Race and LatCrit Theory Framework: Chicana and Chicano Students in an Urban Context," *Urban Education* 36, no. 3 (2001): 308-342.

<sup>55</sup> Derrick A. Bell, "Who's Afraid of Critical Race Theory." *University of Illinois Law Review* 1995, no. 4 (1995): 893-910.; Daniel G. Solorzano and Dolores Delgado Bernal, "Examining Transformational Resistance Through a Critical Race and LatCrit Theory Framework: Chicana and Chicano Students in an Urban Context," *Urban Education* 36, no. 3 (2001): 308-342.

<sup>56</sup> Robin DiAngelo, *White Fragility: Why It's So Hard to Talk to White People about Racism* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2018), 14.

detail in Chapter Two, subsection The Alleged Genocides at the Hand of the Ottomans and Chapter Four, subsection Academics for Peace Petition.

School districts have voted to ban professionally written, high-quality literature which results in limiting the development of critical thinking processes of the students. This censorship is motivated by the undercurrent of hegemonic white dominance in America. The Reader's Digest list of top 10 banned books included *The Diary of a Young Girl* by Anne Frank and *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee.<sup>57</sup> One of the arguments from parents suggested that these books were too traumatizing for students. Interestingly, these arguments align with false social media posts that claim the Holocaust did not happen and that slavery did no harm to the enslaved. For example, Najarian points out the self-proclaimed Revisionist Historians argue the Holocaust is merely a lie to garner support for establishing Israel as a state.

"Revisionist historians" are a group of right-wing ideologues who operate out of the "Institute for Historical Review" in Torrance, California. Although few of them are actually trained in history, they put out sham scholarly articles in their mock-academic publication, the *Journal of Historical Review*, which looks, from the outside at least, like a typical historical journal. "Revisionists" deny that the Holocaust ever occurred — that the destruction of European Jewry was planned, that any Jews were gassed, and that gas chambers even existed. To them, the notion of the Holocaust is a lie of Zionist origin, created solely to gain sympathy for the state of Israel.<sup>58</sup>

In the case of slavery in the United States, a common argument is that the justification for slavery is biblical. The argument is riddled with what Quinlan and Ramsey call “Neo-

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<sup>57</sup> Leandra Beabout, “30 Banned Books You Should Probably Read Right Now,” 2022, accessed February 25, 2023, <https://www.rd.com/list/banned-books/>.

<sup>58</sup> James Najarian, "Gnawing at History: The Rhetoric of Holocaust Denial," *Midwest Quarterly* 39 (1997): 74-89.

Confederate misinformation.”<sup>59</sup> The basis of the misinformation is a misinterpretation of biblical themes which leads to the belief that slavery is part of the human social construct. Wilkins and Wilson are Neo-Confederate Christian Reconstructionists and argue that “slavery is morally justifiable because they can identify biblical references that sanction Christian servitude.”<sup>60</sup> Both of these theories, the Holocaust deniers and the Neo-Confederates are considered part of a network of white supremacists who twist small fragments of truth into grand schemes of notions propagated as if they were based in actual historic fact. The undercurrent created by these groups are present in the dialogue surrounding what can and should be taught in U.S. education. The education system in Türkiye has undergone similar reconstructions of history in the texts and through closer examination of the issues arising from these events, we may better understand the parallels between Turkish and American public education. The ripple effect and subtle transformations within Turkish education can function as a guide-map for understanding what could potentially happen in the U.S. if the white supremacist groups are allowed to prevail in suppressing and reconstructing curriculum.

Several Hizmet educators and students have been invited to tell their stories and offer their personal accounts of the social genocide they have experienced that has occurred within the past two decades in Türkiye. These stories serve a two-fold purpose. The first purpose is to document the experiences from the perspective of victims of the social genocide and purge

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<sup>59</sup> Sean M. Quinlan and William L. Ramsey, "Southern Slavery As It Wasn't: Coming to Grips with Neo-Confederate Historical Misinformation," *Oklahoma City University Law Review* 30, no. 1 (2005): 209-224.

<sup>60</sup> J. Steven Wilkins and Douglas Wilson. *Southern Slavery, As It Was* (Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 1996).

of educators within Türkiye contrasted with the dominant historical narrative present in official government-controlled media. These stories reveal sharp contrast to the dominant, mainstream portrayal of events that have shaped the Erdoğan era and are similar to previous genocides alleged in Turkish and Ottoman history. The second purpose is to shed light on the pedagogical practices of exiled Turkish teachers working as practitioners in charter schools in the United States as they tell the story. This historical research is intended to enable Hizmet educators, who have been de-facto silenced by the genocide in Türkiye, to “un-mute” their voices.<sup>61</sup>

### **Overview of Chapters**

The chapters contain a series of stories, or the oral histories, of subjects who identify as Hizmet people. Their stories are woven into background information related to the history and modern-day events occurring in Türkiye which have led to a social genocide of the Hizmet people. Many thousands have perished, even more have been tortured and imprisoned, and some have fled in exile from their homeland. The human toll of this humanitarian crisis extends far beyond the borders of Türkiye and is ongoing currently in 2023. I identify the followers of the Gülen Movement as the “Hizmet People” and explain in greater detail how this group has had a profound influence on the education system in Türkiye and elsewhere in the world, including the U.S.

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<sup>61</sup> “Un-Muted” is the title of an exhibit I curated in the Kansas City metropolitan area in September 2022, in conjunction with my work on the Advisory Board of Advocates of Silenced Turkey. The exhibit displayed over 40 artifacts from individuals and families who have lost their lives directly as a result of the social genocide occurring in Türkiye since 2016. Included in the display were narrative descriptions provided by the family members who submitted the artifacts. The Un-Muted exhibit has since been presented in a number of cities throughout the U.S.

This dissertation is comprised of seven chapters. Those chapters include this introduction to the research followed by seven chapters, Appendices, and a Bibliography. In some instances, a language interpreter was used to facilitate and translate the interviews to clarify the data collected in the Turkish language. Whenever possible, beginning with Chapter One: Introduction, I have used footnotes to explain in English frequently used Turkish concepts which include proverbs, folklore and abbreviations used in the vernacular and followed those entries with more in-depth descriptions in Appendix A: Terms, Abbreviations and Turkish Words. An example of the confusion in language can be illustrated in the official name change of the country from Turkey to Türkiye in June 2022.<sup>62</sup> The new, official spelling of the name is really no different in sound than it was before the change if you were to pronounce it originally in Turkish. The *ür* combination is meant to sound like a deeper, soft pronunciation of the word “tour” combined with the word “key,” with a “yuh.” In addition, Appendix B: Guide to Turkish Vocabulary, offers a brief insight into special Turkish characters not found in English and a pronunciation guide which may make reading the text more comfortable for non-Turkish speakers.

Chapter Two: Historical Context provides a context for the strong sense of nationalism, and the ritualized normalization of the use of strength and force as a means of political control couched in a guise of democracy. Chapter Two includes the story of Ub who is a historian in exile within his own country, Türkiye. Even though he has been stripped of his position as a professor and expresses feeling of betrayal by the legal system, he has not

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<sup>62</sup> The Republic of Turkey has been renamed and acknowledged by the United Nations as Türkiye. This change occurred in June 2022. Tiffany Wertheimer, “Turkey Wants to Be Called Türkiye in Rebranding Move,” *BBC News*, June 2, 2022, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-61671913>.

lost his passion and interest in the rich history of a country that he loves. Ub was a tenured professor at a prestigious university in Türkiye and published numerous peer-reviewed articles. He is currently working temporary jobs to support his family. His story reflects the silencing of voices in higher education by the political power of the Erdoğan regime.

Chapter Three: The Gülen Movement in Türkiye and Abroad offers an overview of the origins of the Hizmet Movement, a brief description of the charism of Fethullah Gülen, the Imam and scholar credited with founding the movement, and the stories of several Hizmet educators living abroad who were unwittingly caught up in the political conflict and subsequent genocide occurring within Türkiye. The stories of Serkan and Melike, a Turkish married couple living and teaching in Kyrgestan, and Zabit Kişi a school administrator from Kazakhstan, give insight into the length and breadth of the reach of the Erdoğan regime in terms of how far the political arm is willing to go to silence Hizmet educators working abroad in international schools.

Chapter Four: The Erdoğan Era in Türkiye explores the complex relationship between the Erdoğan regime, Fethullah Gülen and the Hizmet People. This chapter presents insights into the rise to power of an authoritarian government over the course of the past 20 years from within a democratic Islamic nation. The political regime has been challenged by a group centered around a civil and religious belief in fairness, equity and justice, and the government's response has been swift and severe. In this chapter the stories of Hizmet educators and students who have been imprisoned as a result of their religious beliefs and affiliation with the Gülen Movement reveal resilience and strength in the face of seemingly insurmountable odds. The story of EEK sheds light on the depth of the vocation of Hizmet educators. It was very challenging in these series of interviews to uncover what made Hizmet



pedagogy unique or special because the storytellers were unable to articulate descriptors that set them apart from others, however, EEK's actions while in prison reflect the uniqueness of the Hizmet pedagogical practice. It is commonplace in Islam for a person unjustly imprisoned to experience "school of Yusuf" which is the practice of studying the Qur'an while detained. EEK during his detention went beyond his own personal gain to use the message of the Qur'an as motivation to continue the gift of teaching inside the prison. He set up an actual school to teach the other prisoners basic skills including reading, math and science so when they were released they might have a better life. His actions exemplified teaching as a life vocation and the call to serve was the voice of Hizmet within self for taking action.

Chapter Five: Watershed Moments is an attempt to briefly explain a very complex political milieu from the perspective of an American educator. "We hold these truths to be self-evident..." is a phrase that describes a cultural mindset I was born into and can never escape. As an American, it is very difficult for me to step outside of, what I consider to be, fundamental human rights such as the unfettered pursuit of life, liberty and happiness; the right to vote freely in an election; and the right to free speech and academic freedom. Chapter Five touches on what can happen when the voice of dissent becomes a serious threat to a political power. In the U.S., we are free to express our dissenting opinions and organize rallies and protests as we see fit; in Türkiye such acts could result in imprisonment or death. In Türkiye, a series of events occurred that led to a cataclysmic moment with the alleged coup attempt, which for the Hizmet people has become their "Day of Infamy." This chapter includes memoirs from those who have yet to survive or have perished as a direct result of the genocide. The story of a mother's unconditional love for her son, Melek and Furkan

Çetinkaya who survived the Bosphorus Bridge incident followed by the story of Ragip Enes Katran, a student who perished in the event, reveal the plight of unwitting students caught in a very dangerous political situation. The voice of Gökhan Açikkollu, the first martyr of the genocide and an educator is shared by Mina Leyla, who had the opportunity to interview his family and publish a book about his experience. I had the opportunity to interview Mina and asked her about experiences of speaking to the families of those who perished in the genocide; and she said that although it was one of the most difficult experiences of her career, it was important for her to share in the grief of families. She believed the gift of journalism by Allah allowed her to be a voice for those who had been silenced by death. Chapter Five also includes the story of Ha who was the cellmate of Sue's mother (Sue's story appears in Chapter Six). Ha was a history teacher in Türkiye with a Ph.D., was charged as a Hizmet affiliate and while detained, taught herself to make jewelry out of pieces of trash. She has since been released from prison, but her family has abandoned her. Ha is not legally permitted to teach, and selling the jewelry she makes is her only means of support.

Chapter Six: Hizmet Educators and Students Living and Working in Exile contains the stories of survivors who have fled the persecution and have relocated to the United States and Europe. These stories reveal a sense of resilience expressed by individuals who are piecing their lives back together and are cut-off from their family and home in their beloved Türkiye. Yet, in the face of such hardship these educators have found hope in their Hizmet faith which has led them to continue their avocation, and the students have discovered innovative ways to continue their studies. In the safety of their refuge, the participants expressed voice empowerment and were encouraged to share their stories without fear of capture, torture, and imprisonment. As relayed earlier, Ali was a graduate student who went

to meet with his advisor. One thing led to another, and he was detained for ten months.

Although many students may fear meeting with their advisor, most likely do not go to prison as a result. Earl and Sue found themselves, not by accident, teaching at a charter school in the U.S. They are a young couple and were happily teaching at an international school in South-East Asia when Sue's passport came close to its expiration date. Sue's entire family had been arrested and imprisoned for a number of years and it would be impossible for her to renew her Turkish passport. Her only choice was to seek refuge with her husband in a country of safe-harbor or return to Türkiye to face imprisonment herself. R-Man is a recent arrival to the U.S. and also teaches at the charter school with Earl and Sue. He is nervously awaiting the arrival of his wife and children from his home country of Turkmenistan; he prays daily for their Visas to be issued.

Chapter Seven: Conclusions, Interpretations and Moving Forward is a discussion of the significance of this oral history research as expressed by the participants and my own interpretation of their experiences with each. In their unique ways, all of the participants expressed a resounding sense of hope for the future and a commitment to continue to carry out their work while patiently waiting for justice to be served; a justice they know may never come in this lifetime. In addition, I have included comments from the victims of the Hizmet genocide being carried out by the Erdoğan regime in Türkiye who have now become outspoken advocates for justice at the cost of having their names listed on "Most Wanted" lists with rewards for their capture and return to Türkiye. Aslihan Kas and Hafza Girdap are activists in the organization Advocates of Silenced Turkey. They are both educators and work tirelessly to ensure the voices of the Hizmet people do not remain silent. Aslihan and a group of volunteers smuggled artifacts out of Türkiye at great personal risk to ensure light

would be shed on the truth of what is happening in this genocide. These artifacts became a part of the Un-Muted Exhibit which is touring the U.S. and Canada. One example included in this text is a photo and description of the Akçabay family. Hatice Akçabay, the mother, was a teacher. She and her three sons drown in the Maritsa River attempting to flee persecution.

Hafza Girdap is the Executive Director of AST. Appendix D: Hafza Girdap on Wanted List in Türkiye is an excerpt from a list that is commonly used at various institutions to detain individuals in Türkiye. For example, if a person were to go to a hospital for treatment and present their identification document, their names would be compared to this list; if their name appeared on the list the security forces would more than likely arrest the individual. This scenario happened to Sue's father recently when he was re-detained. Hafza refuses to remain silent while so many suffer. The final story is that of Bre, a student whose university was abruptly closed, and the records of her attendance lost. Her family was abruptly forced to flee Pakistan to seek refuge in a country of safe harbor.

Chapter 8: Epilogue connects the research to U.S. classrooms and what is needed to accommodate students who have experienced relocation trauma. In addition, it explores genocide in the broader context of history and persistence. It concludes with remarks about the silencing and voice empowerment.

I spoke with Murat Kaval, President, Advocates of Silenced Turkey, about the significance of this research and this is the message he asked to share: *“My hope is that the emotions and sentiments evoked by the stories shared in this research foster greater understanding of the situation unfolding in Türkiye with the Erdoğan regime. I pray it becomes an inspiration and source of hope to countless other educators and students whose voices have been silenced, not only in Türkiye, but elsewhere in the world as well. The work*

*of advocacy is a privilege bestowed on each of us, and the opportunity to speak for those who cannot is a measure of our empathy for those who are the victims of injustice.”*

I agree with Murat, one very real measure of our humanity is in our ability to listen with the ear of our heart and take action with the conviction of our mind. I had the honor to meet all of the people in this research either in person or virtually through my volunteer commitments with Advocates of Silenced Turkey and Dialogue Institute of Kansas City. At first, it was hard for me to believe what I was hearing. Their stories seemed incredulous. I asked myself repeatedly “how can this be happening, in this day and age, to such highly educated and well-informed people?” Then, I read the literature, reviewed social media and news reports, and conducted the interviews; what follows are my interpretations of the narrator’s stories interwoven with primary documents, artifacts, memoirs, news and social media posts, and photographs of artifacts from family members of victims of the genocide. Secondary sources of data included journal articles and books that served to corroborate the stories and other primary sources.

## CHAPTER 2

### HISTORICAL CONTEXT

The story of Ub reminds me of the mythological Phoenix. Academics work very hard to rise to the level of “professor” in their career paths, which is what Ub did at the university in the history department specializing in the Ottoman Empire and Turkish Republic. Suddenly, and without warning, his life’s work seemed to burst into flames and all seemed lost when the government began its “crackdown” on the Hizmet people.<sup>1</sup> In his story that follows in this chapter, Ub appears on the rise from the ashes and his enthusiasm for history is like smoldering smoke beneath the surface of his life which cannot be extinguished. His story and comments are intermingled within a brief history of events that have shaped the country now known as Türkiye, beginning with the Tanzimat period, and working through wars and genocides of the early 1900s through early years of the Republic of Turkey.

One of the purposes of this historical research is to situate the social genocide of the Hizmet people<sup>2</sup> during the Erdoğan era in the context of Turkish history.<sup>3</sup> In order to more

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<sup>1</sup> “Crackdown” is the descriptive term used in headlines by the BBC and other media outlets to describe the efforts of the Erdoğan regime to quash the Hizmet movement in the months immediately following the alleged coup attempt in July 2016. Jenny Norton and Cagil Kasapoglu, “Turkey's Post-Coup Crackdown Hits 'Gülen Schools' Worldwide,” *BBC*, September 23, 2016, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-37422822>.; Paul B. Osterlund, “How a Secretive, Unknown Smartphone App Became the Center of Turkey’s Post-Coup Crackdown,” *The Verge*, February 28, 2018, <https://www.theverge.com/2018/2/28/17059806/turkey-overthrow-attempt-coup-bylock-app>.

<sup>2</sup> The social genocide of the Hizmet people did not have a clear start date; however, Fethullah Gülen has been in exile since 1999 (see Chapter 3), and the severe imprisonment, persecutions and torture of large groups of Gülen Movement followers appear to have begun in 2016 with the alleged coup attempt in July 2016 (see Chapter 5). As of the date of the publication of this research, the conflict has yet to be resolved.

<sup>3</sup> Deniz Kenan, *143 Social Genocide Practices in Erdoğan’s Turkey* (Advocates of Silenced Turkey Publishing, 2022), 1-92.

fully understand what is now happening to the Hizmet people, I invited a Turkish historian who has been both personally and professionally victimized by these events to share his story. He believes it is no coincidence that genocide is the “tool of choice”<sup>4</sup> used by the ruling political regime as an attempt to ensure longevity in their reign of power because it has been, in his words, “this way for many, many years... many centuries, really...”<sup>5</sup>

### **The Late Ottoman Empire and the Rise of a Turkish Republic**

Major world events have shaped the history of Türkiye and formed the backbone of its ethnic and cultural identity which courses through its contemporary political and social veins.<sup>6</sup> The history of the Ottoman Empire spanned more than 600 years and dominated a vast area of the Mediterranean coast lines, Arabic peninsula, southeastern Europe and western Asia as shown in Figure 2.1.<sup>7</sup> At its peak in the 15th Century, the Ottoman Empire was recognized as one of the most powerful in the world, was led and ruled by warriors with a military polity, and power was concentrated in Sultan rule.<sup>8</sup> Figure 2.1 illustrates more

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<sup>4</sup> Ub’s interviews were conducted over a number of sessions because of limitations with Internet access and safety concerns. He often repeated parts of his story and used unique terms and phrases more than once to describe his experiences. He used the term “tool of choice” multiple times in his interviews in the way a native Anglophonic speaker would say something was “an inevitable choice.” In one specific instance, he used the phrase to describe the use of genocide by the Erdoğan regime.

<sup>5</sup> The words of Ub, a Hizmet historian, educator, and surviving victim of the Hizmet persecution in Türkiye.

<sup>6</sup> Specifically, events of the past 200 years in the region formerly known as the Ottoman Empire. These events include, but are not limited to, the Balkan Wars, World War I, the Treaty of Lausanne, the Armenian Genocide, World War II and other regional conflicts. Each of the events mentioned are described in greater detail later in the text with appropriate citations.

<sup>7</sup> Metin Heper, and Şule Toktaş, "Islam, Modernity, and Democracy in Contemporary Turkey: The Case of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan," *The Muslim World* 93, no. 2 (2003): 157-185.

<sup>8</sup> Metin Heper, "The Ottoman Legacy and Turkish Politics," *Journal of International Affairs* 54, no. 1 (2000): 63.



Figure 2-1: The Ottoman Empire at its Peak.

clearly the vast nature of the Ottoman Empire at its zenith and its control over the southern and eastern coastal areas of the Mediterranean Sea, the Arabic Peninsula and the Black Sea. This system of governance was authoritarian and heavily enforced by centralized military power which continues to characterize the tendencies of the modern Turkish Republic.<sup>9</sup>

The first oral history narrator, Ub, shared his story in ways that connected the nature of the ruling structure of the late Ottoman Empire and early Turkish Republic to modern-day events. The unstructured interviews were conducted over a series of six virtual meetings during the summer of 2023. During these interviews it was obvious, Ub possessed a great deal of knowledge about the late Ottoman Empire and with a sense of urgency told how his life was affected by more recent events of the genocide. I believe, he felt that a deeper

<sup>9</sup> Şerif Mardin, "Center-Periphery Relations: A Key to Turkish Politics?" *Daedalus* 102, no. 1 (1973): 169-190.



understanding of historical and political milieu of the nation would lead to a deeper meaning of critical events that were the forerunner of the genocide of the Hizmet people.

As introduced in Chapter One, an interesting anecdote is that the name Türkiye has only been recognized as the name of a physical location on the globe known as Turkey since June 2022.<sup>10</sup> The common name of the country is Turkey which is the anglicized pronunciation of Türkiye, and even most Turks continue to refer to it as such.<sup>11</sup> The narrator in this oral history typically referred to the country now known as Türkiye as “Turkey” when he spoke and I honored his words with the consistency of directly quoting him in the narrative.

### **Ub’s Story<sup>12</sup>**

Ub is a historian and an educator; it is his passion and his life’s work. He was an Associate Professor at a prestigious public university in Türkiye. He received a Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) in History from Istanbul University in Istanbul and specialized in the history of the late Ottoman Empire and early Turkish Republic. He started his higher education teaching career in 2005 and has expressed a deep-seated interest in historical research. He said, “you can’t commit your life’s work to something you don’t feel passion about; and this is what I love to do... you know, it is so very interesting, because it makes

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<sup>10</sup> Tiffany Wertheimer, “Turkey Wants To Be Called Türkiye In Rebranding Move,” *BBC News*, June 2022, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-61671913>.

<sup>11</sup> Rachel Treisman, “Turkey Will Now Be Known as Türkiye (At Least At The U.N.),” *National Public Radio*, June 2022, [https://www.npr.org/2022/06/02/1102596510/turkey-changes-name-turkiye-united-nations#:~:text=Turkey%20will%20now%20be%20known,at%20least%20at%20the%20U.N.\)&text=Turkey%20has%20a%20new%20name,nation's%20name%20since%20last%20winter](https://www.npr.org/2022/06/02/1102596510/turkey-changes-name-turkiye-united-nations#:~:text=Turkey%20will%20now%20be%20known,at%20least%20at%20the%20U.N.)&text=Turkey%20has%20a%20new%20name,nation's%20name%20since%20last%20winter).

<sup>12</sup> Ub is the pseudo name of the narrator of this oral history and is an individual living in Türkiye awaiting a decision on his fate by the Supreme Court. He asked his identity not be revealed in this document for the safety of himself and his family.

everything make so much more sense...” Prior to completing his doctorate, he taught History in the public schools (high school age students). He stated that he believes “history is a window to the future... you know, there are so many things we can learn from looking back at what has already happened...”

Shortly after the alleged coup attempt in July 2016, Ub was detained briefly and accused of being a member of Hizmet. He called it “tagging by the University administration or maybe I should say it was tagging by the Director of the University... I really think it was the Director who came after me” which he described as a process the University used to identify educators who had any potential affiliation with Hizmet or the Gülen Movement. The evidence presented against him at trial alleged he incorporated lessons from the Gülen Movement into his teaching practice. His lawyer asserted at trial that Ub merely presented the material regarding the Gülen Movement in the context of its historical influence on the history of the Turkish Republic, just as he had taught other historical philosophical movements such as Marxism, socialism and fascism. At his last court appearance, he was exonerated of the charges by the judge, which Ub said gave him momentary relief. The moment, however, was short-lived because the prosecutor almost immediately appealed the decision. Ub said, “I heard the judge say the words that I was innocent and free of the charges... my heart was racing, and I almost couldn’t believe it, even though I know... and Allah knows... I have done nothing wrong... I thought maybe my life would return to normal...” Ub was soon informed, by his lawyer, the prosecutor had appealed the judge’s decision which Ub understood to mean his legal troubles would linger. Ub is currently awaiting another court appearance and a final ruling on the charges by the Supreme Court (of Türkiye).

At the time of his arrest, Ub was fired from his position at the University and his assets were seized, including his home, access to public health care, and pensions. Ub stated that until these legal issues are completely cleared, he is prohibited from teaching in any public or private university in Türkiye or teaching at any other public or private educational institution, by decree of the Court.<sup>13</sup> When he reviewed this statement, he wanted to make it clear that, unlike his perception of private schools in the United States, in Türkiye the private universities are under the authority of the YÖK (Council of Higher Education, Yüksek Öğretim Kurulu).<sup>14</sup> He also stated that he hopes to be able to return to teaching in a university but is uncertain if that will ever be possible given the rhetoric surrounding all the people who have been terminated under similar circumstances. Ub went on to describe the financial hardship he and his family have experienced. He said he has a wife and two daughters in their twenties to support financially and he has not been permitted to work in his field since 2016. He described the financial burden to his family as having had a “dramatic effect on all of their lives.” Since that time, he said he has taken what he called “menial jobs” wherever he could find them to support his family through these difficult times. Essentially, he stated he is willing to work at whatever jobs he can find to make ends meet for his family; and it has, by his own account, most certainly not been easy.

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<sup>13</sup> Ub said that public and private educational institutions are both controlled by the government and the ministry of education (YÖK – Council of Higher Education, Yükseköğretim Kurulu). In other words, he said, private schools do not have the autonomy to go against what the government decrees; therefore he is not eligible for employment in a private institution as well as not eligible in a public institution.

<sup>14</sup> YÖK – Council of Higher Education, Yüksek Öğretim Kurulu. Established in 1981 by Turgut Ozal the then leader of the Turkish Republic. Gülden Özcan, "Neoliberalism, National Security and Academic Knowledge Production in Turkey," *The University and Social Justice: Struggles Across the Globe* (2020): 61.

When I invited Ub to tell his story, he said “I don’t have much to say about what has happened...you know it just does not make much sense to a reasonable person... but I would like to see what you are doing with this research...I think it could be very interesting...” He indicated he wanted to be certain I was presenting details of Turkish history that were, in his mind, the most significant and relevant to my research. Ub suggested I look closely into the history of the late Ottoman Empire and formation of the early Turkish Republic to provide insight into current events unfolding with Hizmet educators in Türkiye today.

Our first discussion delved more deeply into the Tanzimat period.<sup>15</sup> He explained that the Tanzimat was a time of upheaval in the Ottoman Empire, and many things were occurring that would lead to the demise of their rule. In hind sight, the decisions the Sultans made in these times led to a natural transition to a political system of the nationalistic dominance of a single party system.<sup>16</sup>

### **The Tanzimat Period 1839-1908**

The Tanzimat period, perhaps unbeknownst to the Ottomans, was the end stage of a Sultanic reign lasting more than 600 years. The demise of the Ottoman Empire was due to a several cataclysmic factors that included wars, genocides and industrialization. The Tanzimat period, also known as the period of reconstruction of the Ottoman Empire, involved tension between three competing ideologies. The first was “Ottomanism” which is a term that refers

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<sup>15</sup> *Tanzimat* – means *Reorganization* in Turkish (Google Translate). The Tanzimat Period, 1839-1908, was a time of reorganization within the Ottoman Empire. The translation of Secil Akgun’s work refers to the events of the period as “renovations.” Seçil Akgün, "The Emergence of Tanzimat in the Ottoman Empire," *Osmanlı Tarihi Araştırma ve Uygulama Merkezi Dergisi OTAM* 2, no. 2 (1991).

<sup>16</sup> Erik Jan Zürcher, "The Ottoman Empire and the Armistice of Moudros," in *At the Eleventh Hour: Reflections, Hopes, and Anxieties at the Closing of the Great War, 1918*, ed. Hugh Cecil and Peter H. Liddle (London: Leo Cooper, 1998), 266-275.

to the sense of Ottoman nationalism and identity.<sup>17</sup> In this period the Ottomans really did not have a powerful sense of national identity because they were spread over a great distance and included varying cultures within the territories of the Empire. The territories included Arabic, Mediterranean, Asian, Christian and Islamic cultures blended together. The second ideology was “Pan-Islamism”<sup>18</sup> which formed a moral fabric to tie the cultures together.<sup>19</sup> This ideology positioned Christians in a lower tier class and eventually pushed them out of public view within the territories. The final ideology “Turkism” or “Turkish Nationalism” prevailed as a perceived political means to modernization and the appearance of embracing Western practices. Islamism was relegated to defining a moral code for the country and acted as a conservative structure guiding nationalism toward ethical practices.<sup>20</sup>

Nationalism and secularism were viewed as pathways to modernization and westernization for the emerging nation. Unlike their Arab-Islamic counterparts, “Turkish nationalism did not take an anti-Western position.”<sup>21</sup> In fact, Turkish nationalists believed that the Western way was the conduit to modernization which translated to economic

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<sup>17</sup> M. Hakan Yavuz, "Cleansing Islam from the Public Sphere." *Journal of International Affairs* 54, no. 1 (2000): 21-42.

<sup>18</sup> Pan-Islam is the notion that all Muslims should unify on the basis of a shared identity. Sohail H. Hashmi, "Islam, the Middle East and the Pan-Islamic Movement," in *International Society and the Middle East: English School Theory at the Regional Level*, London: Palgrave Macmillan UK (2009): 170-200.

<sup>19</sup> Koumlidou Gesthimani, "The Rise of Political Islam in Turkey: Is Democracy under Threat?" unpublished Master's thesis, Macedonia University, 2012: 1-41.

<sup>20</sup> Mucahit Bilici, "The Fethullah Gülen Movement and its Politics of Representation in Turkey," *The Muslim World* 96, no. 1 (2006): 4.

<sup>21</sup> This is a quote is in Bilici's article (ibid) from Çağlar Keyder, "The Dilemma of Cultural Identity on the Margin of Europe," *Review (Fernand Braudel Center)* (1993): 19-33, wherein the author portrays Turkey as a peripheral community in Europe which is a far cry from how the Turks would prefer to be perceived.

prosperity and national stability. Nationalism became the ideological tool of modernization and imposed its will on the education system.<sup>22</sup> The prevailing belief was for modernization to be fully realized, Islam would need to be eliminated from the public-school curriculum. Secularism, known as the separation of religious and governmental issues in a state. In the Republic of Turkey, secularism meant the removal of Islam from the public sector, including public education.<sup>23</sup> The political powers pursued secularism as a means to modernization in a western sense which gave rise to a strong sense of Turkish nationalism.

### ***Nationalism, in General***

“It’s our God-given right...” Such a phrase is common in discourse surrounding nationalism, acts of patriotism and dominance. Among exclusive groups attempting to justify acts of domination, there is a prevailing sense that God has ordained a political viewpoint; ergo, such position cannot be challenged. Often the Bible is their source of authority in their argument. For example, the Hebrew book of Genesis, Chapter 12, is perhaps the earliest recorded expression of the divine nature of entitlement to nation-building. “And the Lord said to Abram, ‘Go forth from your land and your birthplace and your father’s house to the land I will show you. And I will make you a great nation and I will bless you and make your name great and you shall be a blessing...’ and later in the text, Abram is instructed to take his family and belongings with him which included his slaves.<sup>24</sup> Not only does this passage give

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<sup>22</sup> Keyder Çağlar, "The Dilemma of Cultural Identity on the Margin of Europe," *Review (Fernand Braudel Center)* (1993): 24.

<sup>23</sup> Suleyman Celenk, "Secularization Process in the History of Turkish Education," *Journal of Social Sciences* 19, no. 2 (2009).

<sup>24</sup> Alter’s translation of the Hebrew text offers insight into humanity’s sense of divine entitlement to colonization and nation-building. Robert Alter, *The Hebrew Bible: A Translation with Commentary*, Vol. 1. WW Norton & Company, 2018.

divine authority for a person to create a nation, it included the “blessings” bestowed upon the person in the form of property which included the ownership of other humans who were commonly known as slaves. People who advocate for the right to slave ownership often use this biblical reference as justification for it; the Bible – both New and Old Testament endorses slavery.<sup>25</sup> This argument is the foundation of dominance by one group of humans over another distinguished by socially derived characteristics such as race, ethnicity and gender, and is purported to be ordained by God.

The God-given right argument is applied to many issues from tax-evasion in Italy to the right to bear arms in the United States and is all neatly packaged in the philosophy surrounding the right of self-determination,<sup>26</sup> a right afforded to all nations in which the people within the nation are entitled to rule themselves through a government apparatus.<sup>27</sup>

The notion of the divine right to self-determination was expressed in the United States in the form of *manifest destiny* which was conceptually used to justify the expansion of the nation to include all the territory between the east and west coasts of the continent.

...that claim (the claim to the territory) is by the right of our *manifest destiny* to overspread and to possess the whole of the continent which Providence has given us for the development of the great experiment of liberty and federated self-government entrusted to us. . . . The God of nature and of nations has marked it for our own; and

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<sup>25</sup> Kevin Giles, "The Biblical Argument for Slavery: Can the Bible Mislead? A Case Study in Hermeneutics." *Evangelical Quarterly* 66, no. 1 (1994): 3-17.

<sup>26</sup> Josef Hien, "Tax Evasion in Italy: A God-Given Right," in Sven H. Steinmo, *The Leap of Faith: The Fiscal Foundations of Successful Government in Europe and America* (Oxford University Press, 2018): 3-32.

<sup>27</sup> David George, "The Right of National Self Determination," *History of European Ideas* 16, no. 4-6 (1993): 507-513.

with His blessing we will firmly maintain the incontestable rights He has given, and fearlessly perform the high duties He has imposed.<sup>28</sup>

Nationalism, in and of itself, is not necessarily a negative term. Benign patriotism is not equivalent to the more extreme and divisive rhetoric, within the U.S. and elsewhere, affiliated with a kind of nationalism that often leads to acts of violence under the guise of the preservation of national security.<sup>29</sup> Bieber defines nationalism as “a malleable and narrow ideology, which values membership in a nation greater than other groups (i.e., based on gender, parties, or socio-economic group), seeks distinction from other nations, and strives to preserve the nation and give preference to political representation by the nation for the nation.”<sup>30</sup> Essentially, nationalism generates borders around a space or territory that encapsulates a group of people with common political unification.

Conceptually, nationalism takes on many forms. Civic nationalism is based on citizenship and the ability of individuals to join the nation, whereas ethnic nationalism is based on the myth of common descent and is thus less inclusive.<sup>31</sup> Often in the media, nationalism is expressed in protectionism, isolationism, xenophobia and anti-elite discourse.<sup>32</sup> The media representations of nationalism often lead to the sense that culture is a

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<sup>28</sup> Pratt quoting Representative Robert C. Winthrop of Massachusetts in *The Morning News*, from August 21, 1844. In Julius W. Pratt, "The Origin of 'Manifest Destiny'," *The American Historical Review* 32, no. 4 (1927): 796.

<sup>29</sup> Craig Calhoun, "The Rhetoric of Nationalism," in *Everyday Nationhood: Theorising Culture, Identity and Belonging After Banal Nationalism* edited by Skey, Michael and Marco Antonsich (Springer, 2017): 17-30.

<sup>30</sup> Florian Bieber, "Is Nationalism on the Rise? Assessing Global Trends," *Ethnopolitics* 17, no. 5 (2018): 520

<sup>31</sup> Hans Kohn, *The Idea of Nationalism* (New York: Macmillan, 1944).

<sup>32</sup> Florian Bieber, "Is Nationalism on the Rise? Assessing Global Trends," *Ethnopolitics* 17, no. 5 (2018): 519-540.



representation of ethnicity, and the preservation of purity within the culture is a foundational expression of patriotism within the nation. "Nationalists advance the right to national self-determination, cultural survival and cultural self-expression, as a self-evident and ethically autonomous principle, alongside equality, justice and political stability."<sup>33</sup> Hard-fought and arbitrary borders now confine regions and are maintained as if they existed from the beginning of time. Nationalism is what has invented nations under the guise of modernization.<sup>34</sup>

The circumstances leading up to the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the rise of the Turkish Republic reflects a shift in the evolution of nation states. Up until this point in Ottoman history, the territory and its inhabitants were nomadic and sought to dominate resources rather than space and location. The fall of the Ottoman Empire and the rise of the Republic of Turkey meant that the nation was defined by geographical space.<sup>35</sup> This space was then maintained by grooming the population through an education focused on nation-building and modernization.<sup>36</sup>

The first Ottoman University, Darülfünûn (the House of Sciences) opened as a fully-fledged university in 1900 after earlier failed attempts to organize a transition from

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<sup>33</sup> Joep Leerssen, "Nationalism and the Cultivation of Culture," *Nations and Nationalism* 12, no. 4 (2006): 560.

<sup>34</sup> Ernest Gellner, "Nations and Nationalism," in *Conflict after the Cold War: Arguments on Causes of War and Peace*, ed. Richard Betts. New York: Routledge, 2015, 378-389. Quoted in Joep Leerssen, "Nationalism and the Cultivation of Culture," *Nations and Nationalism* 12, no. 4 (2006): 559-578.

<sup>35</sup> Joep Leerssen, "Nationalism and the Cultivation of Culture," *Nations and Nationalism* 12, no. 4 (2006): 559-578.

<sup>36</sup> Selçuk Akşin Somel, "The Modernization of Public Education in the Ottoman Empire, 1839-1908: Islamization," *Autocracy and Discipline (Leiden: EJ Brill, 2001)* (2001): 24-29.

traditional madrasas and professional academies.<sup>37</sup> This university enjoyed a modicum of academic freedom and institutional autonomy within a milieu where political leaders sought control over education.<sup>38</sup> Darülfünûn was eventually replaced by Istanbul University in 1933; wherein, the Kemalists exercised ideological control and authority over the institution. This was the first recorded instance in Türkiye of the purge of academics who were viewed as political dissidents and whose political views did not align with the dominant regime.<sup>39</sup> This purge of academics very closely aligns with the experience of the academicians who signed the Academics for Peace Petition in 2015 which is discussed in Chapter Four.

Ub suggested I next examine more closely the events that caused the downfall of the Ottoman Empire and shaped the rise of the Turkish Republic. It seems clear to me that the strong sense of Turkish nationalism was born out of the events occurring during the Tanzimat and early years of the Turkish Republic. The political leaders invested in building a country that would

### **Ub's Story, Continued**

I asked Ub the following question:

*Kari: Ub, you suggested I take a closer look at the Tanzimat period of the Ottoman Empire and the early years of the Turkish Republic, why? What does this have to tell us about what is happening to educators in Türkiye now?*

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<sup>37</sup> Burhan Findikli, "A Republic of Scholars or Scholars of the Republic? Reflections on the Predicaments of Academic Freedom and University Autonomy in Turkey," *Higher Education Quarterly* 76, no. 3 (2022): 541

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid. p. 542

*Ub: Miss Kari. You know, it is very interesting what is happening now because you know Turkey is not really a very old country by modern standards, but it really has a very long history... we have only been a nation for about a hundred years but this sense of nationalism goes way back before there ever was a Turkish Republic and lies in the feet of the Ottomans... There are many countries that are much older but most of them do not have the history that we have, because the Empire was so vast and they ruled for such a long time... you know, more than 600 years. They (the Ottomans) were the most powerful and successful in all of history... You know, Miss Kari, this sense of nationalism is really, I think, just a way of giving a label or a name to this sense of power and domination the Ottomans had over this huge and very rich area... and they used it as a way of maintaining control... and the people didn't object because these powerful forces kept them safe and comfortable, for the most part... society was thriving most of the time and many different cultures were mixing together and getting along... the Ottomans – really the Sultan rulers – didn't care what kind of language you spoke or religion you believed as long as trade kept going and markets contributed to the overall prosperity and success of the region. The Ottomans were nomadic and regional so when other countries started forming hard borders it was very difficult for the Ottomans to adapt. At the turn of the 20th century things had really deteriorated, and the end was coming no matter what they would try to do. Their last great hope was to establish a university to prepare great minds in science and math to adapt to the coming industrial age. Unfortunately, they still had way too many people in leadership positions that believed they could use force to make wars and prevail over a vast amount of territory. The Balkan Wars, World War*

*I and the Independence War proved to be too much... too great of a challenge for the Ottomans, and then combined with internal conflicts, it resulted in the collapse of the Empire... Miss Kari, now you might want to take a look at what happened when the Ottomans felt threatened and tried to regain their power. They tried to use force and might to secure power and it's very interesting that they became so limited in their views which is what led to these genocides that occurred. They laid blame for their losses at these peoples and responded by crushing them.*

### **The Fall of the Empire**

Prior to the Balkan wars, World War I (WWI), and the Independence War (in the Ottoman Territory), the Ottoman Empire was powerful and is historically among the longest-lived reign of a political authority.<sup>40</sup> The territory included much of the north of Africa, and most of the eastern Mediterranean in Europe, including what is now Greece. It spanned inland eastward to the Black Sea, Caucasus mountains and Persia. By 1914, the Ottoman Empire had been reduced considerably in size and its greatest perceived threat in the mid to late 1800s was Russian aggression.

Figure 2.2<sup>41</sup> shows the reduced territory, known as Anatolia, under the control of the Ottomans in 1914; they no longer controlled the southern coastal area of the Mediterranean Sea and had lost most of their grip on the European continent. Toward the turn of the

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<sup>40</sup> Alan Mikhail, and Christine M. Philliou, "The Ottoman Empire and the Imperial Turn," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 54, no. 4 (2012): 721-745.

<sup>41</sup> "The Ottoman Empire: 1350 to 1918," The Islam Project. January 25, 2011. [http://www.islamproject.org/education/Ottoman\\_Empire.html](http://www.islamproject.org/education/Ottoman_Empire.html). In Central Oregon Community College website, <http://web.cocc.edu/cagatucci/classes/hum213/Maps/Maps1.htm>



Figure 2-2: Ottoman Empire in 1914.

twentieth century, the empire had started to implode and was losing its firm grip on its outlying territories; the fall of the Ottoman Empire was inevitable.<sup>42</sup> Several major events made its downfall a foregone conclusion; the first were the Balkan Wars and World War I, and then the Ottoman alignment with Germany and Austria-Hungary coupled with the alleged Armenian genocide which is now a completely taboo topic of discussion within Türkiye.<sup>43</sup> Each of these events were stairsteps toward the demise of the Ottoman Empire, while simultaneously a tertiary issue fomented under the surface in its Arab territories on the

<sup>42</sup> Nermin Menemencioglu, "The Ottoman Theatre 1839-1923," *Bulletin (British Society for Middle Eastern Studies)* 10, no. 1 (1983): 48-58.

<sup>43</sup> Dilaver Arıkan Açar and İnan Rüma, "External Pressure and Turkish Discourse on 'Recognition of the Armenian Genocide'," *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies* 7, no. 3 (2007): 449-465.

Arab peninsula, and southern Mediterranean coastal region, the rise of fascism and communism in Europe and Asia, and the global economic impact of the Great Depression.<sup>44</sup>

### **Ub's Discussion of The Balkan Wars**

During one of my conversations with Ub, he expressed a keen interest in the Balkan wars and indicated they were significant events in Turkish history. In a nutshell, the first Balkan War pitted Greece, Bulgaria, Serbia and Montenegro against the Ottomans in 1912. The second Balkan War arose in 1913 when the Bulgarians attacked Greece and Serbia over territorial disputes.<sup>45</sup> In simplistic terms, the outcome of the wars resulted in these countries breaking away from the Ottoman Empire and becoming independent nations.

*Kari: Ub, can you tell me why you think the Balkan Wars were so significant?*

*Ub: Well, Miss Kari, you know, it all really started with the French Revolution in 1789. The French proved that the people could rise up against authorities (authoritarianism) and take control. They showed the rest of the world that the people could rise up and get away from these unfair situations. Let's not forget something about the Balkans; Russia and the Austrian-Hungarian Imperium encouraged these countries to rise up against the Ottomans which makes it very complicated because just a little later the Ottomans sided with the Germans, Austrian-Hungarians in World War I to rise up against the Russians. So, the lines of alliance were always changing.*

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<sup>44</sup> Vahakn N. Dadrian, "The Documentation of the World War I Armenian Massacres in the Proceedings of the Turkish Military Tribunal," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 23, no. 4 (1991): 549-576.

<sup>45</sup> Harry N. Howard, "The Balkan Wars in Perspective: Their Significance for Turkey," *Balkan Studies* 3, no. 2 (1962): 267-276.

*Then, you see, the efforts to make nations separated by language and religion is something the people wanted. If you look it up it will be called 'Turanism' which is this thing that means that the people who have the same backgrounds stay together which flowed from the sense of nationalism that evolved out of the French Revolution. Essentially, it is saying that the people demanded the right to express their religion and culture without repression by a governing force that does not align with their own views. This sense of nationalism was a demand for congruence in governance consistent with the prevailing culture, religion and language of the region. This is what happened in these wars because these peoples wanted to establish their own independent countries and have their own legal system and leaders; they no longer wanted to be under the authority of the Ottoman Sultans. They had different cultures than the Turks and the differences could no longer be reconciled... the French Revolution had demonstrated to the outside world that it was possible for others to also seek independence in the hopes of being successful.*

*...for the Balkan peoples, I think that religion was one of the main factors because they were Christians and in the minority when they were part of the Ottoman Empire. It was not good for them because they were not treated fairly as they had been before (in the past). After the turn of the nineteenth century things had really changed and the level of discrimination against them was very high by the Ottomans who were Muslims and no longer as accepting of the Christians as they once had been. This didn't happen overnight it was always working under the surface and the bitterness between the peoples was building up over time.*

*After the Balkan wars, after 1913, all of the people who were Muslims had to migrate away from these areas to Anatolia from these Balkan areas... those were the Turkish Muslims who were living there but could no longer stay there. Those were the people who eventually moved to Anatolia and formed what is now the Turkish national identity. The end result of these wars was the birth of Turkish nationalism which is so important to the history of the world, really. The people segregated themselves by culture, religion and language. This was a very bad time for many of the people. The wars killed a lot of people and then some of the people were blamed by the Ottomans for the losses in the war and they were killed because of it. It was a very bad time. There also was a lot of bad information about how to deal with these problems and get the people to live together without any issues. After the wars (the Balkan wars and World War I), they had this thing called 'The Big Exchange' in Turkey and Greece that occurred in 1924 after the Turkish Republic was established.<sup>46</sup> ...as a historian and an academician I do not agree with these relocation programs for resettling the people – this is not a humane way to treat people. The ripple effect is something they can never recover from.*

During the Tanzimat period the dominant group within the Ottoman Empire were the Turks, who were Muslims, and who had evolved a sense of what became Turkic nationalism. Throughout my interviews with Ub, he frequently referred to this process as

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<sup>46</sup> The “Big Exchange” is the commonly referred to name for a population exchange that occurred in 1924 after the establishment of the Turkish Republic that was a part of the Treaty of Lausanne. It was intended to be a means of resettling refugees after the wars into compatible areas delineated by religion, language, and culture. It impacted approximately 2 million people. Onur Yildirim, "The 1923 Population Exchange, Refugees and National Historiographies in Greece and Turkey," *East European Quarterly* 40, no. 1 (2006): 45.



“Turkification;”<sup>47</sup> which I came to understand as the process by which Turkish culture is defined, imposed on the masses, and is passed down through generations. This attempt at Turkic dominance splintered the Ottoman Empire ideologically which included polarization within Islam between the more conservative Arabs and the liberal leaning Turks. This separation resulted in the Arabs establishing nations exclusive of Turkish control and influence in the Arab peninsula and north African Mediterranean coastal regions.<sup>48</sup> When the Balkan wars erupted, two wars in a series in the same region, it became evident that the “secular multi-national ideology” within the Ottoman reign had failed.<sup>49</sup>

### **World War I**

During World War I (WWI), the Ottoman Empire aligned with Germany and Austria-Hungary to fight against Russia, whom the Ottomans perceived as their greatest threat. Logically their entry into the WWI made sense because of the need to defend the eastern boarder of the Empire in the Caucasus mountains against Russia and its communist

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<sup>47</sup> Turkification is a term I believe Ub created. I understood it to mean the process by which people living within the boundaries of Türkiye become enculturated in Turkish lifestyle and customs which includes religion, language, social mores, and civic leadership. I would describe my understanding of this concept as assimilation.

<sup>48</sup> Erik Jan Zürcher, "The Ottoman Empire and the Armistice of Moudros," in *At the Eleventh Hour: Reflections, Hopes, and Anxieties at the Closing of the Great War, 1918*, ed. Hugh Cecil and Peter H. Liddle (London: Leo Cooper, 1998), 266-275.

<sup>49</sup> Eyal Ginio, "Mobilizing the Ottoman Nation During the Balkan Wars (1912-1913): Awakening from the Ottoman Dream," *War in History* 12, no. 2 (2005): 158.

ideology.<sup>50</sup> The outcome of war, however, was not in favor of the Ottomans; they suffered tremendous losses which had devastating consequences for the Empire.<sup>51</sup>

When the title of Ottoman Sultan was eliminated in the parliamentary government, the Ottoman Empire officially ended in 1922.<sup>52</sup> Turkey was declared a Republic on October 29, 1923, when Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (1881-1938), an army officer, founded the independent Republic of Turkey. He then served as Türkiye's first president from 1923 until his death in 1938, implementing reforms that rapidly secularized and westernized the country.<sup>53</sup> At this point in history, the Republic of Turkey occupied a relatively small, but powerful, territory and the reign of the Sultan was forever eliminated from the landscape of Turkish politics. In the end, the Treaty of Lausanne was signed and the Republic of Turkey was an independent nation and the Ottoman Empire was no longer, but its war ripples had lasting effects.

### **1923 – The Republic of Turkey**

The Ottoman Empire transitioned to the Republic of Turkey in 1923 through an election process that signaled the formalization of a democratic government.<sup>54</sup> This

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<sup>50</sup> Edward Erickson, "The Turkish Official Military Histories of the First World War: A Bibliographic Essay," *Middle Eastern Studies* 39, no. 3 (2003): 190-198.

<sup>51</sup> Vahakn N. Dadrian, "The Documentation of the World War I Armenian Massacres in the Proceedings of the Turkish Military Tribunal." *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 23, no. 4 (1991): 549-576.

<sup>52</sup> İbrahim Saylan, and İlkin Özdikmenli Çelikoğlu, "The Significance of the Kemalist Modernization for Modernization Theory," *Uludağ Üniversitesi Fen-Edebiyat Fakültesi Sosyal Bilimler Dergisi* 22, no. 40 (2021): 663-703.

<sup>53</sup> The election of Atatürk and his death are commonly known details in Türkiye. This particular website offers a good overview of his time as president of Türkiye. "Kemal Atatürk," August 21, 2018, <https://www.history.com/topics/middle-east/kemal-ataturk>.

<sup>54</sup> Helen Rose Ebaugh, *The Gülen Movement: A Sociological Analysis of a Civic Movement Rooted in Moderate Islam* (Springer Science & Business Media, 2009), 15.

governing body became the symbol of “Turkishness” which was remained of the Ottoman Empire when the nation was formed. “‘Turkishness’ as an umbrella identity marker is the result of the Turkish War of Independence (1919–1922) and the outcome of transforming the multi-ethnic Ottoman Empire into the Turkish nation-state.”<sup>55</sup>

The newly formed government then moved to assert authority over the school system within the new Turkish Republic and enforced a national curriculum with little reverence for academic freedom, especially in higher education. The tension between the academics and government officials has not waned since the inception of the nation.

The long-term interests of society are assumed to be best served when the educational process leads to the advancement of knowledge and knowledge is itself best advanced when inquiry is free from restraints by the state, the church, or other institutions and special-interest groups. These early reforms took a radical turn with the establishment of the Republic under Mustafa Kemal Ataturk and the adoption of *Tevhid-i Tedrisat Kanunu* (the Law of Unification of Education) in 1924, which placed education under state control through the Ministry of National Education.<sup>56</sup>

The educational reforms set forward by Ataturk became known as “Kemalism” and remain an influence in Turkish public education through today. Later, in Chapter Three, I explain in greater detail how the Gülen Movement’s educational reforms challenged Kemalism which, at times, increased the tension between the Hizmet people and government leaders. Ub stated that he believed the center of the conflict was ideological and that when confronted, it was a natural response for the government to use force as a means of control. He further stated he did not believe the government was effective “in this day and age” because, he said, “they

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<sup>55</sup> Tahir Abbas, and Anja Zalta, “‘You Cannot Talk about Academic Freedom in Such an Oppressive Environment’: Perceptions of the We Will Not Be a Party to This Crime! Petition Signatories,” *Turkish Studies* 18, no. 4 (2017): 7.

<sup>56</sup> Deniz Kandiyoti, and Zühre Emanet, "Education as Battleground: The Capture of Minds in Turkey," *Globalizations* 14, no. 6 (2017): 869-876.

cannot control the Internet.” He emphasized that the availability of information was invaluable to ensure that the history being told about what is happening now would not be the same as it was before such as in the case of the Armenian genocide.

### **Ub’s Comments on the Use of Power and Political Control**

*Kari: Ub, can you please help me understand why people in Türkiye are not allowed to discuss the Armenian Genocide?*

*Ub: The Turks will never accept the position that they were responsible for any genocide. That is not at all what they believe, and, as you know it really is all about how the story is told and who does the telling. The Turkish History textbooks will tell you that the Armenians sided with the Russians in the war because they were Christians and that is why the Ottomans did not prevail in the war.*

*Kari: You are talking about World War I, correct?*

*Ub: Yes that is it.*

*Kari: But weren’t the Hungarians and Austrians also Christians?*

*Ub: Yes but the Armenians were living in the Ottoman Empire and under the rule of the Sultan. They were mainly a Christian minority and were forced to fight for the Ottomans in the war regardless of their preference to remain neutral. They really had no incentive to fight for the Ottomans but they were basically forced to do it. They were identified as traitors at the end of the war because the Ottomans lost in the war. So, the Ottomans felt justified by what they did to the traitors as an act of punishment for their disloyalty.*

*Kari: But the rest of the world does not see it that way, right?*

*Ub: I know what they say, but the Ottomans were losing control and had to place the blame somewhere. I do not believe they will ever take responsibility for*

*what they did and now so many years have passed, there will be no way to prove what really happened, and who would be responsible? The Ottomans no longer exist.*

*Türkiye is its own country and the Sultans no longer rule or have any political power or position.*

*I will admit, however, that the use of persecution and the elimination of political dissent are part of the political mind of leadership in Türkiye and has been since the inception of the nation. As a nation, we have leaders who rule through absolute authority and strength, and some have done it better than others. They all dress up nice and say the right things to get elected but when it comes down to it, they rule with the fist and the men under them obey or disappear. Yes, we have a judicial system, but it answers to the top.*

### **The Alleged Genocides at the Hand of the Ottomans**

In 1914 the Ottoman Empire controlled 2.4 million square kilometers of territory, including all of modern-day Turkey and most of the Middle East. The Turks were dominant in the Empire, but the territories also included Arabs, Kurds, Greeks, Armenians and other ethnic minorities.<sup>57</sup> This control of territory was an illusion and within a few short years the Ottoman Empire was relegated to what is now the borders of modern day Türkiye.

What the Ottoman army did to the Armenians is viewed by the outside world as a genocide. The Ottomans assert their actions were justified because the Armenians sided with the Russians in the WWI. Another version of the story says the Armenians fought with the

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<sup>57</sup> The Battle of Gallipoli and New Zealand's experience of WWI is not the focus of this study, however, the insights into the descriptions of the Ottoman Empire offers a more neutral perspective of events than may be found in Turkish history texts. "New Zealand History," <https://nzhistory.govt.nz/war/ottoman-empire>.

Ottomans and were blamed for the loss in the war to the Russians. What is not disputed, however, is the Armenians were forced to flee through the Caucasus mountains in the middle of winter with no rations or supplies. The Ottoman army tortured, raped and massacred people who were too old or too infirmed to escape.<sup>58</sup> The atrocities committed by the Ottoman Empire army under the leadership of the Sultan (government) were rebuked by the international community.

On 24 May 1915, the Allied Powers (Britain, France, and Russia) jointly issued a statement which for the first time ever explicitly charged a government, the Ottoman Empire, with committing a "crime against humanity" in reference to that regime's persecution of its Christian minorities, including Armenians, Assyrians and Greeks.<sup>59</sup>

Post WWI, dominance through genocide was rampant within the Ottoman Empire. The army attempted to grasp power through the most horrific of means in an attempt to assuage the losses incurred through the war.<sup>60</sup> Essentially, they attempted to rally what power was left in the Empire through the villanization of non-Islamic ethnic groups.

As David Fromkin put it in his widely praised history of World War I and its aftermath, "A Peace to End All Peace": "Rape and beating were commonplace. Those who were not killed at once were driven through mountains and deserts without food,

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<sup>58</sup> Dominik J. Schaller, and Jürgen Zimmerer. "Late Ottoman Genocides: The Dissolution of the Ottoman Empire and Young Turkish Population and Extermination Policies—Introduction." *Journal of Genocide Research*, 10, no.1 (2008): 7-14.

<sup>59</sup> Manus I. Midlarsky, *The Killing Trap: Genocide in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 342.

<sup>60</sup> Vahakn N. Dadrian, "The Documentation of the World War I Armenian Massacres in the Proceedings of the Turkish Military Tribunal," *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 23, no. 4 (1991): 549-576.

drink or shelter. Hundreds of thousands of Armenians eventually succumbed or were killed.”<sup>61</sup>

The practice of genocide as a means of political and social control is embedded in Turkic history and permeates its culture.

### **Genocide in Historical Context**

Genocide, a term coined in the 1940s as an attempt to describe the inexplicable horrors of the Holocaust, is a tidy, sanitized word used to describe horrific events leading to the eventual death or the eradication of people targeted by those in power.<sup>62</sup> It is used by authoritarian governments to quash perceived threats and to eliminate competition for positions of authority.<sup>63</sup> Genocide is the ultimate form of power and dominance, and is deemed on the world stage as an absolute affront to human rights.

Genocide is the deliberate killing of a large number of people from a particular nation or ethnic group with the aim of destroying that nation or group.<sup>64</sup> Genocide was an attempt to describe the inexplicable horrors of the Holocaust. The United Nations (UN) defines genocide as:

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<sup>61</sup> In a New York Times article from 2017, Kifner describes David Fromkin’s description of the atrocities committed in the genocide in his book *Who Started the Great War in 1914?* Kifner’s article is meant to provide an overview of the Armenian genocide in contrast to the official details of the event presented in Turkish history texts. Kifner, John, "Armenian Genocide of 1915: An Overview," *The New York Times* 2007, [https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/ref/timestopics/topics\\_armeniangenocide.html?simple=True](https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/ref/timestopics/topics_armeniangenocide.html?simple=True).

<sup>62</sup> “How Do You Define Genocide?” *BBC*, April 4, 2022. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-11108059>.

<sup>63</sup> Dominik J. Schaller, and Jürgen Zimmerer. "Late Ottoman Genocides: The Dissolution of the Ottoman Empire and Young Turkish Population and Extermination Policies—Introduction." *Journal of Genocide Research*, 10, no.1 (2008): 7-14.

<sup>64</sup> United Nations Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect, “Genocide,” 2022, <https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/genocide.shtml>

...any of the following acts committed with the intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnic, racial or religious group, as such:

- Killing members of the group
- Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group
- Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part
- Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group
- Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.<sup>65</sup>

In order to better understand why the purge and expulsion of Hizmet people is occurring in Türkiye today, we must better understand the historical context of the political evolution of Turkey in the 20th century. Essentially, genocide has been a political tool used to control and quash dissent in Turkish and Ottoman history. We must be reminded of major world events and better understand its evolution to a modern democracy and its impetus for change.

*Kari: Ub, why was it so important for you to tell your story the way in which you did? You could have said anything, but you focused your story on a discussion of the history of Turkey. Why was it important to you to tell your story this way?*

*Ub: Well, first I want to thank you Miss Kari for indulging me. As you know, and I said before, I am a historian and I am also a teacher. It is my greatest desire to teach others about the history of this great nation and even though they... a few of them... only really a few of them... are preventing me from doing it, I am able to do it here. Sometimes, you know, I am feeling very discouraged and I am riding my bike up into the mountains and then I see what a beautiful place Allah has given to*

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<sup>65</sup> United Nations, 1951 United Nations Genocide Convention, Article Two.



*me...thanks God (Alhamdulillah)<sup>66</sup>... I believe this is a great country and it was built on the shoulders of giants, whatever is happening now will pass and the truth will be revealed when the history is written. For now, I am just praying for my family to be safe and for the many other families to survive without being harmed.*

### **Concluding Remarks**

The Ottoman Empire was once a vast and powerful presence dominating the landscape of what has now become modern-day Türkiye. The presence of the cultural and political influence of the Ottomans pervades Turkish political and social culture today. The Ottomans used their power and might to force the inhabitants within their territories into submission, and as the Empire crumbled and failed through a series of lost battles and wars, their brutality reflected in the genocide of the Armenian people. This militaristic approach to ruling the land is embedded in Turkish history and culture and persists through modern times. In the following chapter I will examine more closely the subsequent impact of military leaders in the Turkish Republic's attempt to modernize with an appearance of democratization in the twentieth century. The era of the new Turkish Republic offered many opportunities for philosophical discourse and the evolution of the young nation. The tension between Turkey's desire for western-style democracy, its confidence in military authority and the rule of law, and the appearance of liberal Islam within the context of moral character

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<sup>66</sup> Alhamdulillah, Arabic: **الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ**, and means "Praise be to God!" In addition, Mashallah is commonly said among Muslims and means things have occurred due to God's will. Inshallah is also commonly used and means things will occur if God wills it. UB frequently uses both Inshallah and Mashallah, and the phrase "thanks God" when he speaks. He nearly always conveys a sense of gratefulness even when he is speaking of the hardships he has endured.

building, created great opportunity for the emergence of a civil society such as the Gülen Movement which occurred in the mid- to late-1900s.

## CHAPTER 3

### THE GÜLEN MOVEMENT IN TÜRKIYE AND ABROAD

*Listen to the silence  
It has much to say.  
Rumi*

Serkan and his family are among the lucky; if you can say giving up your home and leaving everything behind to resettle in a new homeland with teen-age children, lucky. A surreptitious departure, a family separated for three years, the uncertainty of fate, the upheaval of careers; all of which seem rather insignificant in comparison to what others have faced. Zabit Kişi and his family have suffered intensely with no end in sight. While Serkan and his family were able to escape the seeming certainty of persecution, torture and imprisonment, others were not so lucky. The families in these stories are Hizmet families from Türkiye who were teaching abroad in central Asian countries and alleged to be a part of the Gülen Movement's educational initiative.

#### **The Gülen Movement**

The Gülen Movement, also known as the Hizmet Movement,<sup>1</sup> is a faith-inspired civil society that has no formal structure which means it exists, but it cannot be recognized through a system characteristic of a typical not-for profit organization or business.<sup>2</sup> Its

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<sup>1</sup> The terms Gülen Movement and Hizmet Movement are used interchangeably in this document.

<sup>2</sup> Jenny Norton and Cagil Kasapoglu, "Turkey's Post-Coup Crackdown Hits 'Gülen Schools' Worldwide," *BBC*, September 23, 2016, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-37422822>.

members follow the teachings of a Turkish Islamic scholar and educator, Fethullah Gülen, who lives as a reclusive exile in the United States (U.S.).<sup>3</sup>

In the Prologue to her book, Helen Rose Ebaugh described the Gülen movement as a place “where the moderate Muslim voice could be heard to counter the radical Islam that is continuously presented in the U.S. media. The Gülen movement is one example of modern Islam that stands in opposition to much of what is presented in the media.”<sup>4</sup> The publication date, 2009, of the Ebaugh book is significant because it was released before the collapse of the relationship between the Gülenists and the Erdoğan regime in Türkiye. The date also has relevance in the U.S. because of the trend in Islamophobic rhetoric with post 911 media representations of extremists as the face of all Muslims.<sup>5</sup> In this current Islamophobic milieu it is often difficult for the moderate Muslim voice to be heard over the clamor of extremism, however, as Ebaugh points out, the Gülenists are steadfast.

It is likely true that Fethullah Gülen was initially unaware of what his ideas and ideals would become when he entered religious ministry. As a humble man, he most certainly rejects the notion that he is a modern-day prophet, even though he says what the dominant political leaders do not want to hear and calls ordinary people to fully live an authentic expression of faith, which is precisely what prophets do. In retrospect, it is evident that Gülen was destined for this role without an awareness of his future significance. He was,

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<sup>3</sup> Tim Franks, "Fethullah Gülen: Powerful but Reclusive Turkish Cleric," *BBC*, January 27, 2014, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-25885817>.

<sup>4</sup> Helen Rose Ebaugh, *The Gülen Movement: A Sociological Analysis of a Civic Movement Rooted in Moderate Islam* (Springer Science & Business Media, 2009), xi.

<sup>5</sup> Christine Ogan, Lars Willnat, Rosemary Pennington, & Manaf Bashir, "The Rise of Anti-Muslim Prejudice: Media and Islamophobia in Europe and the United States," *International Communication Gazette*, 76 no. 1 (2014): 27–46. <https://doi-org.proxy.library.umkc.edu/10.1177/1748048513504048>.

essentially, home schooled after his third year of elementary school. His father was an Imam and Qur'anic scholar, and his mother was a service volunteer in the community. His parents frequently invited people into their home for dialogue and discussions surrounding religious philosophy and political ideology. He was immersed in service-oriented theology at a very early age. He became an Imam, a preacher, who theorized the world could be a better place if we would invest in education, health care and social services. In other words, he built the movement by preaching and practicing a message that encourages the pursuit of a life committed to ensuring the common good of all humanity.<sup>6</sup>

The Gülen Movement as a civil societal foundation is meant to challenge the discourse of conflict and embody the idea of dialogue as a means to embrace social and cultural diversity, and to achieve harmony in the world.<sup>7</sup> The significance of the Gülen Movement must be viewed in the context of its existence. Fethullah Gülen began his work in the 1960s at a time when Western culture was embroiled in the Civil Rights Movement and contemporary modern culture was awakening to issues of justice in the pursuit of peace. Gülen's civil society is meant to create a world wherein diverse cultures live in harmony through dialogue and understanding. A summation of this philosophy is woven into the Journalist and Writer's Foundation Mission Statement which was organized around the leadership of Gülen:

The modern world will be shaped by systems and approaches which cherish universal values which consider affection, tolerance, understanding and unification as basics;

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<sup>6</sup> Muhammed Çetin, "Reductionist Approaches to the Rise and Aims of the Gülen Movement," *Islam in the Age of Global Challenges: Alternative Perspectives of the Gülen Movement, Speaker Biographies and Conference Proceedings* (Washington DC: Rumi Forum, 2008), 73-113.

<sup>7</sup> Talip Kucukcan, "Social and Spiritual Capital of the Gülen Movement," *Muslim World in Transition: Contributions of the Gülen Movement* (International Gülen Conference Proceedings, London, 2007), 25-27.

which consider Man (Humanity) as a universe and cherish Him (Humanity) accordingly; which see life only as a race of merits; which prefer to overcome all hostilities, hatred and wrath by friendship, tolerance and reconciliation; which undertake the mission of delivering culture and knowledge for the benefit of humanity; which can create a balance between the individual and the society without sacrificing one for the other; which have a great vision without falling into the trap of utopias and without leaving realities aside; which believe in the merit of keeping determinant factors such as religion, language, and race free from any compulsory pressure; and which evaluate superiority as a sublimation to human merit... Ours is only a modest contribution but the peace of our hearts and consciences depend on it. — *The Journalists' and Writers' Foundation Mission Statement*, formulated from an address given by Fethullah Gülen in 1997.<sup>8</sup>

The Journalists and Writers Foundation (JWF) organization continues to function as an independent 501(c)3 in the United States and Europe. Its stated purpose is “Working for Universal Peace” and its honorary president is Fethullah Gülen. Its vision statement continues to include a dedication to striving to develop a culture of peace with respect shown to human rights through sustainable development. JWF continues to promote diversity and inclusion through social engagement, shared knowledge and building partnerships oriented toward positive social change.<sup>9</sup>

### **The Philosophy of Nursi**

Spirituality is not a common element in the narrative of Islam beliefs with the exception of Sufism which is the mystical tradition of Islam. When one reads any of the philosophical teachings of Gülen, the Sufic influence of Said Nursi is clearly present in his writings.<sup>10</sup> The influence of the Nursi movement appears throughout Gülen’s teachings and are a synthesis of Islam and science; an acceptance of democracy as the best form of

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<sup>8</sup> Mucahit Bilici, "The Fethullah Gülen Movement and its Politics of Representation in Turkey," *The Muslim World* 96, no. 1 (2006): 2.

<sup>9</sup> “About JWF,” Journalists and Writers Foundation website, <https://jwf.org/about-jwf/>.

<sup>10</sup> Thomas Michel, "Sufism and Modernity in the Thought of Fethullah Gülen," *The Muslim World* 95, no. 3 (2005): 341.

government within the rule of law; raising the level of Islamic consciousness by indicating the connection between reason and revelation; and achieving this-worldly and other-worldly salvation within a free market and through quality education.<sup>11</sup>

In the case of Nursi reading circles, the core topic of discussion was how to respond to the demands of the modern world with Islamic knowledge in order to make Islam compatible with modernity.<sup>12</sup> The philosophy of Nursi was at odds with the drive to be recognized as a modern country in the view of western Europe and the United States. This philosophical conflict has waxed and waned first with movement toward secularization and then away from it. These secularization efforts minimized of Islam in the public sphere as a means of appearing to be a modernized nation.<sup>13</sup> With the Erdoğan regime, Islam has re-entered the social agenda and now permeates Turkic polity and culture; but, in so doing, the nation has lost its identity as the embodiment of moderate Islam with the rise of authoritarianism.<sup>14</sup>

### **The Poetry of Rumi**

An overlay of influence to Gülen's spiritual development is the poetry of Jalāl al-Dīn Muḥammad Rūmī (1207–1273) which is based on a world view focused on a deep vision of the universe flowing from love. "Rumi listens to the praise uttered by the flowers and all

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<sup>11</sup> Helen Rose Ebaugh, *The Gülen Movement: A Sociological Analysis of a Civic Movement Rooted in Moderate Islam* (Springer Science & Business Media, 2009), 25.

<sup>12</sup> Mustafa Tuna, "At the Vanguard of Contemporary Muslim Thought: Reading Said Nursi into the Islamic Tradition," *Journal of Islamic Studies* 28, no. 3 (2017): 311-340.

<sup>13</sup> Suleyman Celenk, "Secularization Process in the History of Turkish Education," *Journal of Social Sciences* 19, no. 2 (2009): 101-108.

<sup>14</sup> Cengiz Aktar, "Turkish Political Islam's Failure," *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 45, no. 4 (2019): 493-502; and Ergun Özbudun, "Turkey's Judiciary and the Drift Toward Competitive Authoritarianism," *The International Spectator* 50, no. 2 (2015): 42-55.

other creatures but also visualizes them in the various positions of prayer.”<sup>15</sup> This intense respect for creation is the cornerstone of Gülen’s belief in peaceful coexistence that leads to the continuous improvement of a better world. This strong belief is a core value in Hizmet education practices.<sup>16</sup> In the face of the secularization movement within Türkiye, Gülen seemingly overcame the push for modernity and reconciled the conflict it created within his core beliefs. His followers remained true to their strong Islamic roots with an overlay of love in response to the world’s issues. Gülen combined his understanding and embodiment of the philosophy of Nursi with the poetry of Rumi and what emerged was an Islamic spirituality that generated a world-wide movement.

In Rumi philosophy, human dignity and social justice are central to a world view in which human rights are defended for all people and humanity works in harmony for prosperity and equity in governance.<sup>17</sup> This philosophy of Rumi is the quintessential essence of Gülen’s ideology passed through his teachings to the followers of Hizmet. The writings of Rumi influenced Gülen and the movement in both vision and priority by setting a high standard for the followers couched in a layer of the expectation that it shall be lived-out because it is the right thing to be done.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Ibrahim Ozdemir, "Creative Love and Nature, Mevlana Jalal al-Din Rumi," *Interreligious Insight* 4, no. 2 (2006): 3.

<sup>16</sup> Muhammed M. Akdag, "The Roots of Fethullah Gülen’s Theory of Education and the Role of the Educator," *Hizmet Studies Review* 2, no. 3 (Spring 2015): 55-70.

<sup>17</sup> Ergin Ergül, “Rumi and His Holistic Human Rights Theory,” *Daily Sabah*, December 11, 2018, <https://www.dailysabah.com/op-ed/2018/12/11/rumi-and-his-holistic-human-rights-theory>.

<sup>18</sup> Loye Ashton, and Tamer Balci, "A Contextual Analysis of the Supporters and Critics of the Gülen/Hizmet Movement," *Islam in the Age of Global Challenges: Alternative Perspectives of the Gülen Movement, Speaker Biographies and Conference Proceedings* (Washington DC: Rumi Forum, 2008), 73-113.



The Gülen Movement conveys a message of tolerance and kindness that envisions change; the ripple effect of which can be felt throughout the world. The Gülen Movement has developed a wide net of connections throughout the world and has schools and institutions in at least 72 countries which makes its global presence unavoidable.<sup>19</sup> The author, Ian Williams refers to the influence of the Gülen Movement beyond the borders of Türkiye as “global ummah” which is an Arabic concept for the global community.<sup>20</sup>

### **Gülen Philosophy and Pedagogy**

A top priority of the Gülen movement is education as means of liberation from poverty and global conflicts of culture and civilization. Hizmet educators employ a curriculum that is meant to lead students to higher functioning in modern society in balance with a morality code that is oriented toward peaceful resolution of conflicts and inter-faith dialogue and cooperation.<sup>21</sup> In his own words, Gülen describes what he believes is the difference between an educator, which he refers to as a “true teacher” and a teacher:

“Education is different from teaching. Most people can teach, but only a very few can educate... True teachers sow the pure seed and preserve it. They occupy themselves with what is good and wholesome, and lead and guide the children through life and whatever events they may encounter.” For Hizmet educators, teaching is a sacred activity, and working to help students experience positive change is a teacher’s “foremost duty.”<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ian Williams, “A Movement in Counter-Point: The Significance of the Fethullah Gülen Movement as a Global Educational and Inter-Religious Model of Social and Religious Change - a UK Perspective” (p. 782), in *Proceedings of the Conference Islam in the Age of Global Challenges: Alternative Perspectives of the Gülen Movement, Speaker Biographies and Conference Proceedings* (Washington DC: Rumi Forum, November 2008), 782-806.

<sup>21</sup> Inez Schippers, "Connecting Civilizations? The Gülen Movement in the United States," (Master's thesis, Utrecht University, 2009).

<sup>22</sup> Fethullah Gülen, *Toward a Global Civilization of Love and Tolerance* (New Jersey: The Light Inc., 2004), 208.

Through the workings of the Hizmet people, Gülen seeks to build a more peaceful and tolerant world through education and dialogue.

The cornerstone of Hizmet pedagogy is respect for the value and dignity of human persons.<sup>23</sup> This is the quintessential embodiment of culturally responsive teaching practice in Hizmet led classrooms because they believe each student was created for a purpose and it is the teacher's responsibility is to unveil the mystery of that purpose to the child. The pedagogy of the Hizmet educators is expressed in the Gülen philosophy:

For a school is a vital laboratory of the future, its courses are the portions of life, and its teachers are the heroic masters of healing... A good school is like a pavilion full of angles: It develops individual virtues and guides its students toward the dignity of their spirit. At a good school, children learn the mysteries of the self and realize their potential... The true teacher cultivates and sows the seeds of virtue. S/He is attentive to that which is good and wholesome. S/He sets goals for the students and offers them direction in the face of life's vicissitudes... School introduces us to a lifetime of study. In this respect, our education influences every part of our lives.<sup>24</sup>

This philosophy, under the leadership of Gülen, has led the Hizmet people to develop a vast network of schools throughout the world.<sup>25</sup> This network of schools is now under serious threat of collapse. All of the schools within Türkiye affiliated with Hizmet have been closed and in 2015 the Turkish government hired London-based Amsterdam and Partners, LLP, "to expose allegedly unlawful conduct by the Gülen network worldwide."<sup>26</sup> In the

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<sup>23</sup> Kaya Ibrahim, "Hizmet Educational Philosophy in the Example of a Hizmet-Inspired School; Hayskolen: Could Hizmet Educational Philosophy Be an Alternative Solution to Criminality and Radicalism Among Immigrant-Origin Youths?" Masters thesis (Uppsala University, 2016).

<sup>24</sup> Fethullah Gülen, "Our Philosophy of Education (I)," in *A Fethullah Gülen Reader So That Others May Live*, 1979, 117-118.

<sup>25</sup> Ahmet Erdi Öztürk, "The Repertoire of Extraterritorial Repression: Diasporas and Home States," *Migration Letters* 17, no. 1 (2020): 59-69.

<sup>26</sup> Humeyra Pamuk, "Turkish Government Hires UK Law Firm to Probe Cleric's Global Network," Reuters. (October 26, 2015).

Reuters article, Robert Amsterdam, the founding partner of the law firm, stated “We’re going to look into their activities throughout the United States, Africa and other regions where the network is active.”<sup>27</sup> These investigations have been very effective in closing international schools and aiding the Turkish Intelligence group (MIT) in the return (abduction and kidnapping) of Hizmet educators and administrators to Türkiye to face charges and be detained in Turkish prisons.<sup>28</sup>

### **Who are the “Hizmet People?”**

The word “hizmet” in Turkish simply means “service” and is a term that has deep meaning in the Turkish Islam vernacular. Bilici describes the term as having a “sacred aura in Turkish culture.”<sup>29</sup> Those who subscribe to the teachings of Gülen are what I will refer to in this study as the “Hizmet People.” The people themselves do not refer to themselves as Hizmet because for them it is a way of life and an expression of faith, not a title or membership in a formal organization. For these people, the word Hizmet is a verb and a way of living their understanding of a more authentic following of Islam.<sup>30</sup> Nonetheless, this group of people has been branded as terrorists in their homeland by the Erdoğan regime and

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Advocates of Silenced Turkey, “Beyond Turkey’s Borders: Unveiling Global Purge, Translational Repression, Abductions,” ed./trans. by Youssef Harvey. 2023.

<sup>29</sup> Mucahit Bilici, "The Fethullah Gülen Movement and its Politics of Representation in Turkey," *The Muslim World* 96, no. 1 (2006).

<sup>30</sup> Sabine Dreher, "What Is the Hizmet Movement? Contending Approaches to the Analysis of Religious Activists in World Politics," *Sociology of Islam* 1, no. 3-4 (2014): 257-275.

are experiencing the severest of penalties for their religious expression and political way of life.<sup>31</sup>

The Hizmet People are Sunni Muslims who follow the teachings of Fethullah Gülen.<sup>32</sup> They are a non-violent Muslim movement wherein the “Islamic group is willing to coexist peacefully with peoples of other faiths, supports democracy, cherishes freedom of thought and educational pursuits while recognizing the role of faith and religion, and condemns the use of violence in the name of Islam.”<sup>33</sup>

Root paradigms are clusters of meanings that serve as “cultural maps” to guide groups of individuals to a common purpose. Hizmet is a “durable root paradigm that frames (one aspect of) the cultural map of Turkish-Muslim society.”<sup>34</sup> It provides a counter-narrative to images of extreme Islam present in Western media depictions of jihad violence. Its message is a peaceful coexistence that leads to respect and harmony. However, since 2016, the Hizmet People, branded as “terrorists” by the Erdoğan regime, are currently the subject of religious persecution and imprisonment.<sup>35</sup> The Hizmet People have been labeled as terrorists in their homeland, and have suffered persecution, torture and imprisonment at the hand of a political regime committed to the preservation of power through a perversion of Islamic

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<sup>31</sup> Hasan Aydin, Viktor Mak, and Kristina Andrews, "Academic Freedom and Living in Exile: Experiences of Academics in Turkey," in *Human Rights in Turkey: Assaults on Human Dignity* (Springer, 2021), 339-363.

<sup>32</sup> “Who Is Fethullah Gulen, the Man Erdogan Blames for the Coup Attempt in Turkey?” *CBC*, July 21, 2016, accessed December 9, 2019, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/world/fethullah-gulen-profile-1.3686974>.

<sup>33</sup> Helen Rose Ebaugh, *The Gülen Movement: A Sociological Analysis of a Civic Movement Rooted in Moderate Islam* (Springer Science & Business Media, 2009), 2.

<sup>34</sup> Mucahit Bilici, "The Fethullah Gülen Movement and Its Politics of Representation in Turkey," *The Muslim World* 96, no. 1 (2006): 5.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

law.<sup>36</sup> Those who have fled Türkiye are a part of a refugee diaspora now living in a number of host countries, including the U.S.<sup>37</sup> These individuals face indefinite imprisonment if they were to return to their home country, and any individuals associating with them are put at risk of arrest.<sup>38</sup>

Initially, in the early days of the Erdogan regime, Fethullah Gülen and the Hizmet people were embraced and were assigned to many high positions in the government, including judgeships, military leadership and trusted advisors.<sup>39</sup> The relationship eroded when the Hizmet leaders in these positions began to insist that the regime act responsibly and provide care to marginalized and vulnerable citizens. This led to a seemingly irreparable rift between the regime and the Hizmet People which, since the second decade of the twenty-first century (2010-2020), has led to the unjust imprisonment of men, women, and women with their infants. The pain and suffering individuals have experienced as a result of this situation is immeasurable, individuals and families are now living abroad with little hope of ever returning home.

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<sup>36</sup> Advocates of Silenced Turkey Publishing, ed. Y. Harvey, 2022, <https://silencedturkey.org/reports-2>.

<sup>37</sup> Ahmet Erdi Öztürk, "The Repertoire of Extraterritorial Repression: Diasporas and Home States," *Migration Letters* 17, no. 1 (2020): 59-69.

<sup>38</sup> Between July 15, 2016 and March 4, 2019, 150,348 people were dismissed, 500,654 were investigated, and 96,885 were arrested. In the same time period, 3,003 schools, dormitories, and universities were shut down. Additionally, 6,021 academics lost their jobs, 4,463 judges and prosecutors were dismissed, 189 media outlets were closed, and 319 journalists arrested due to their Hizmet affiliation. Fevzi Sarac, *The Differences Between Political Islam and the Hizmet Movement in Turkey* (Louisiana State University and Agricultural & Mechanical College, 2020).

<sup>39</sup> Mucahit Bilici, "The Fethullah Gülen Movement and Its Politics of Representation in Turkey," *The Muslim World* 96, no. 1 (2006).

The impact to education has been immeasurable. Not only have teachers and educators been summarily dismissed from their positions, virtually all of the Hizmet schools and universities have been closed and the records of their existence erased. This means individuals no longer have valid degrees previously earned from these institutions.<sup>40</sup> The loss of the degrees is but one significant example of the impact of the loss of the schools within Türkiye, the greater long-term consequence is less tangible in measuring what is no longer available in the communities the schools served. Keles describes Hizmet schools as those which support upward social mobility and confidence in addition to providing the necessary skill-sets that empower students to change their own lives.<sup>41</sup> Hizmet schools also provide financial assistance and supplementary education to students in need which aligns with the Gülen ethos of building a more equitable and just world. In this way, Hizmet schools fit Kohn's definition of "good schools." Instead of solely focusing on a market-driven education, Kohn (2015) eloquently states educators must ask themselves what makes good schools.

As I see it, the best sort of schooling is organized around problems, projects, and questions – as opposed to facts, skills, and disciplines. Knowledge is acquired, of course, but in a context and for a purpose. The emphasis is not only on depth rather than breadth, but also on discovering ideas rather than on covering a prescribed curriculum. Teachers are generalists first and specialists (in a given subject matter) second; they commonly collaborate to offer interdisciplinary courses that students

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<sup>40</sup> Fait Muedini, "The Politics Between the Justice and Development Party (AKP) and the Gülen Movement in Turkey: Issues of Human Rights and Rising Authoritarianism," *Muslim World Journal of Human Rights*, 12, no. 1 (2015): 99-122.

<sup>41</sup> Ozcan Keles, Ismail Mesut Sezgin, and Ihsan Yilmaz, "Tackling the Twin Threats of Islamophobia and Puritanical Islamist Extremism: Case Study of the Hizmet Movement," in *Islamophobia and Radicalization: Breeding Intolerance and Violence*, ed. John L. Esposito and Derya Iner (Palgrave Macmillan 2019), 265-283.

play an active role in designing. All of this happens in small, democratic schools that are experienced as caring communities.<sup>42</sup>

This perspective established a Gülen Philosophy and pedagogy attuned to helping students become their best future selves through democratic schools by establishing a world free of religious oppression. Gülen specifically refers to this process as global peace-building; the work is intentional and flows from disciplined faith-base of inclusion.<sup>43</sup> This approach to education transcends economic barriers and ethnic and cultural difference to form partnerships within communities that lead to opportunities students would otherwise not be able to access. Gülen refers to this partnership as the “human agency bridging theory and practice.” Serkan and Melike are shining examples of the partnership Hizmet educators have taken to include a global sense of necessity in the peacebuilding process. Serkan and Melike are educators who left Türkiye to move to a foreign country and teach in schools that were part of the Gülen Movement’s global network of educational models. They are now a part of the diaspora of educators who have fled the persecution of the Hizmet people by the Erdoğan regime.

#### **Serkan: There, But for The Grace of God, Go I<sup>44</sup>**

On the day I met Serkan for the first time, I was told he had only recently arrived in the United States and he spoke very little English. It was a warm day in September 2022, and

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<sup>42</sup> Alfie Kohn, *What Does It Mean to Be Well Educated?: And More Essays on Standards, Grading, and Other Follies* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2004).

<sup>43</sup> Zeynep Sahin, “Interfaith Dialogue Organizations as Actors of Peace Building: Case of Rumi Forum,” in *Proceedings of the Conference Islam in the Age of Global Challenges: Alternative Perspectives of the Gülen Movement, Speaker Biographies and Conference Proceedings* (Washington DC: Rumi Forum, 2008), 694-710.

<sup>44</sup> This expression is often attributed to John Bradford from the 16<sup>th</sup> Century. This Day In Quotes. There, but for the Grace of God, Goes John Bradford. (July 2022), <https://www.thisdayinquotes.com/2011/07/there-but-for-grace-of-god-goes-john.html>.

the truck had arrived with the Un-Muted Exhibit artifacts. The driver of the shipping truck had unceremoniously left two large plastic wrapped pallets stacked high with boxes, wrought iron easels, and display banners in the middle of the parking lot at the church venue for the event. I was responsible for organizing the event and was very stressed because some of the items were heavy and I was unable to physically lift them off the pallet to move them to a safe storage area. I called a friend for help and he said he would send a guy who was not working at the time to help. The man arrived, and I used a translator application on my phone to explain to him what we needed to do which was to move the boxes from the pallets into the storage room. It was not an easy job, it was hot, the items were heavy, and communication was very difficult; however, we were able to accomplish the task. Just as we were about to finish, Serkan literally picked up the last box and carried it into the storage room when he started talking in a very animated voice and pointing to the box. I thought, perhaps, something had gotten broken. He used an application on his phone and then said “I knew this man...I knew this man...” He said it several times while he was pointing to a name written in black magic marker on the outside of the box. He had tears in his eyes. Figure 3-1 is a photo of Serkan holding the box with Zabit Kişi’s name written on it.<sup>45</sup> At the time, I did not need to understand his words in order to comprehend the deep emotions pulsing through him; he was the embodiment of the expression “there, but for the Grace of God, go I.” My grandmother often used this expression to teach me humility and to convey an understanding that another person’s tragedy could easily be our own. Serkan later explained in his interview how the box brought back feelings of deep fear and frustration for events that were occurring all around him.

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<sup>45</sup> Photo source: Kari L. O’Rourke. I personally took the photo.



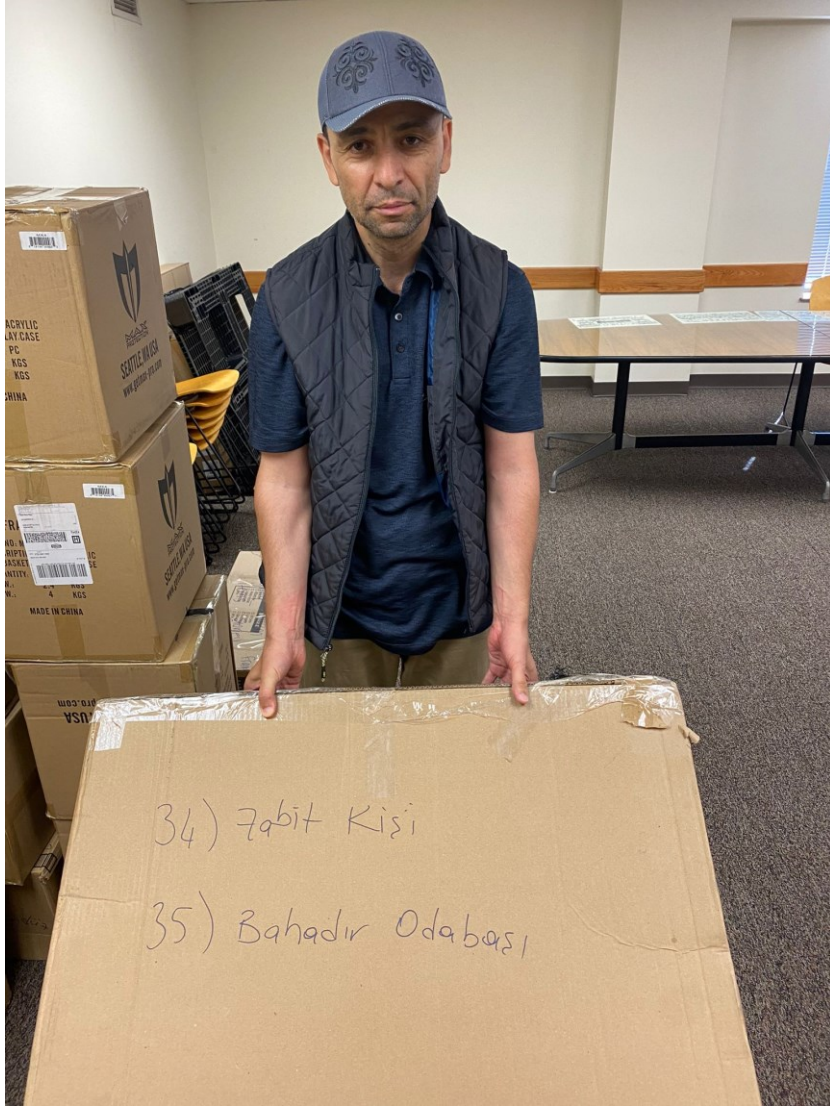


Figure 3-1: Serkan holding the box with with Zabit Kiři's name written on it.

Zabit Kiři was born in the Göksun district of Kahramanmarař, Türkiye. He was a teacher in Kazakhstan and was abducted by force by unidentified persons on a private jet at the Kazakhstan airport while he was awaiting an intercity flight in 2017. His family did not hear from him for a long time and was very concerned about his well-being so they started a campaign on social media to find him. For months, the grieving family had no response to their efforts, but then heard that Zabit was being held in a specially prepared torture center in

Ankara, Türkiye. They later came to understand that he was being held by the Kocaeli Police Department in Ankara, and had been there for 108 days before he was released from the torture to make an appearance in the Court.<sup>46</sup> When his family saw him for the first time since he had gone missing, he had lost 99 pounds, one eye twitched due to exposure to high-grade light, his fingers were burned by electrocution, and he had wounds on various parts of his body resulting from torture. After his police statement, he made a defense by describing the tortures inflicted on him in the court where he was taken. The torture included being stripped naked and sodomized with an electrocution stick similar to that of a cattle prod. The evidence against him presented at Court was an App on his phone called ByLock. Turkish courts have held that anyone in possession of the ByLock App on their phone is sufficient proof of membership in the Gülen Movement and therefore that individual is deemed a terrorist.<sup>47</sup> He is a teacher who was sentenced to 13 years and 6 months for the crime of being Hizmet in Kazakhstan and was kidnapped from a sovereign nation by the intelligence forces of Türkiye.

The box Serkan unloaded from the pallet contained the items shown in Figure 3.2.<sup>48</sup> Mr. Kişi sent letters to his lawyer and his family and made a formal statement in his defense to the Court in Türkiye regarding his kidnapping and torture. These items were among many

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<sup>46</sup> Cevheri Güven, “Zabit Kişi Who Was Tortured for 108 Days: I No Longer Find Odd the Ones Who Committed Suicide,” *Bold Medya*, January 7, 2019, <https://boldmedya.com/2019/07/01/zabit-kisi-who-was-tortured-for-108-days-i-no-longer-find-odd-the-ones-who-committed-suicide/>.

<sup>47</sup> Paul B. Osterlund, “How a Secretive, Unknown Smartphone App Became the Center of Turkey’s Post-Coup Crackdown,” *The Verge*, February 28, 2018, <https://www.theverge.com/2018/2/28/17059806/turkey-overthrow-attempt-coup-bylock-app>.

<sup>48</sup> Photo source: Kari L. O’Rourke. I personally took the photo at the Un-Muted Exhibit in Kansas City, September 2022.

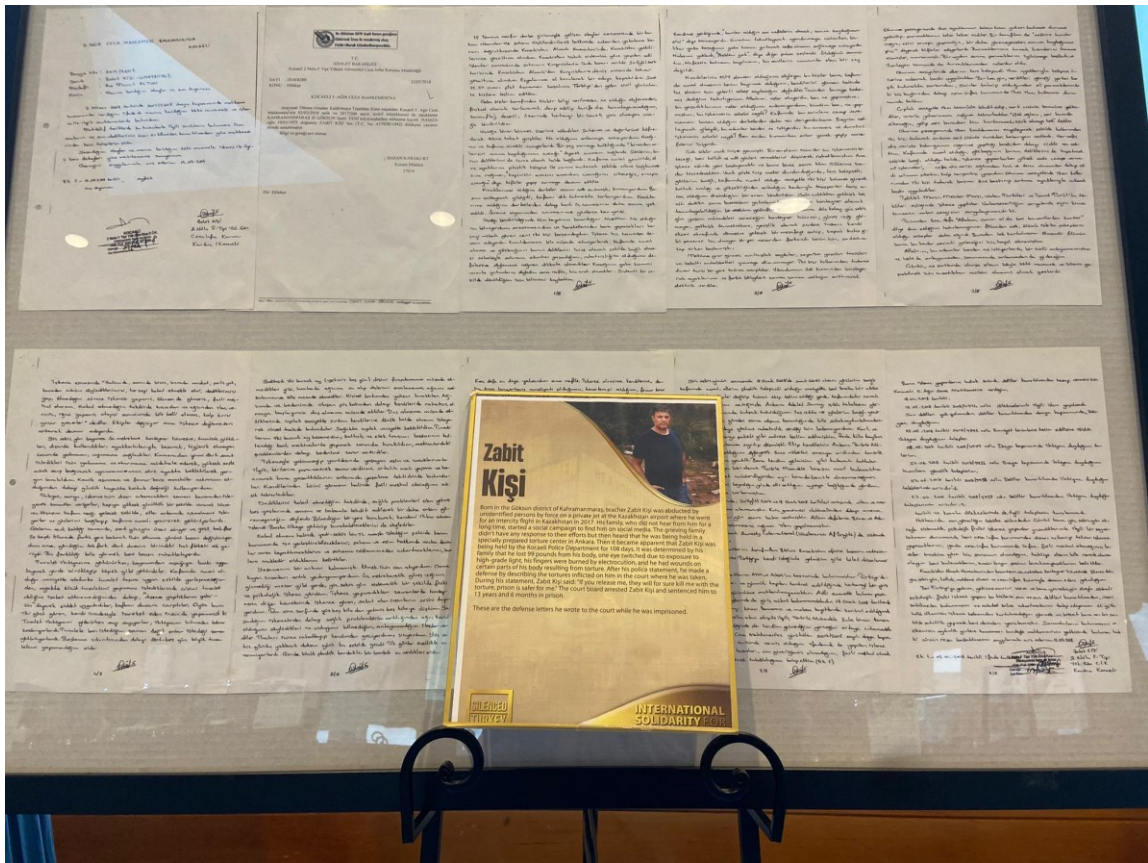


Figure 3-2: Letters from Zabit describing his experience of kidnapping and torture.

on display in an exhibit I coordinated in the Kansas City metropolitan area in June 2022. The exhibit was titled “Un-Muted” and contained displays of more than 40 artifacts from the victims, both living and deceased, of the social genocide of the Hizmet people occurring in Türkiye since 2016. The artifacts in the exhibit were gathered by members of Advocates of Silenced Turkey (AST) from the family members of the victims of this injustice. In addition to honoring the victims respectfully, the goal of the exhibit is to ensure the voices of the

victims are not silenced by the perpetrators of the genocide, and that those who commit human rights violations are held accountable for their actions.<sup>49</sup>

When I received approval to pursue this research, I knew I wanted to interview Serkan, if he was willing to speak about what had happened. I contacted him through a friend, he and his wife agreed to participate in the oral history, and I met him and his family for tea. Doctor Essen agreed to join us to facilitate language interpretation.

### **Serkan's Story**

When I finally had the opportunity to interview Serkan for this project, we exchanged niceties and then I asked him the burning question: “What were you feeling or thinking when you picked up that last box and saw the name Zabit Kişi?”<sup>50</sup> I was quite surprised by his answer.

*Serkan: ...I really didn't know him very well, I knew his son... but I really didn't know him very well either (his son)... he (the son) went to the university where I was teaching and I met the father there when he came for a visit to his son once... but, you know, uhm... well... I knew what happened to him and the same thing happened to one other man who was caught up with Zabit... I am aware of the suffering the whole thing caused his whole family and many others... the son left the university and I do not know what has happened to him (the son), but I am aware of what happened to Mr. Kişi.*

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<sup>49</sup> Advocates of Silenced Turkey (AST) is a 501(c)(3) Not for Profit charitable and educational organization based in New Jersey, exclusively for the purpose of defending human and civil rights. “About Us,” Advocates of Silenced Turkey, <https://silencedturkey.org/about-us>

<sup>50</sup> Eyyup Esen, PhD, worked as the language translator for the interview of Serkan and Melike. In addition, Serkan and Melike's son, Cihangir (pronounced Jee-han-gur), provided interpretations during the interviews.

*Kari: Can you tell me more about it... was he guilty of a crime?*

*Serkan: No, no, no! How could any of us have anything to do that which happened... we are in a different country far away from everything and not even living there... this is crazy, we are good people and just doing our lives. We have not committed any crime and I cannot speak on behalf of Mr. Kişi but I believe he was a good man and no man deserves to have happen what happened to him.*

Serkan continued speaking about the Un-Muted Exhibit and what it meant to him and his family. He, Melike, his son, and his daughter attended the events every evening and volunteered with various tasks including hospitality which involved serving baklava and tea. On one of the evenings, I observed Serkan and his son, Cihangir, looking at one of the items in the exhibit and discussing something that was in the display. I asked him what it meant for him to walk with his son through the exhibit. He said it was very difficult for him to describe how it felt to see all of the things in the exhibit because each item represented more than just the life of the person to whom the item belonged. It represented entire families whose lives had forever been changed by senseless acts of evil. He talked about his struggle to understand why this is happening because he cannot make sense of it. He said in the interview a number of times, “we are good people, how can I tell my son what is happening when I cannot comprehend it myself? I teach my children to obey the laws of man because it is necessary, but the government is not doing so how can I tell them to trust in this system?”

Serkan and Melike have placed a high priority on their children and consider them their most valuable asset. Serkan is a man who did not have an easy path to adulthood in his life and he has worked very hard, along with his wife, to ensure his children have been well cared for and have not had to endure some of the hardships he experienced in his youth.

Serkan's path through education was not an easy route, to say the least. He explained that his family struggled financially and, unlike the United States, educating the children was an insurmountable burden to his parents. After his sixth year of school, he was sent to live with his grandparents and eventually was sent to boarding school. His time at the boarding school was his first encounter with Hizmet people. The Hizmet community helped support him while he was in school, but his family needed him at home. He took a break from school when he was 15 to work in a restaurant to save money to return to high school. A neighbor and family friend, who was Hizmet, took an interest in him and encouraged him to complete high school and prepare for the YKS test to enter university.<sup>51</sup> He passed the test and was accepted to university, but delayed a year before entering so that he could work and save money to pay for his education. He graduated in 2000 with a degree in Turkish language and literature and started his career as a high school teacher in Kyrgyzstan. Serkan received a master's degree in 2010 and completed his Doctorate in Turkic languages in 2015. In 2018 he was awarded the position of Associate Professor at the University in Kyrgyzstan where he had been teaching for ten years. Serkan worked very hard to achieve his rank and position at the University. He described the many hardships he endured while working and attending school. It was not easy for him, but in his words "...this is what Allah asked of me..." I realized I had heard this phrase a number of times in the stories told by the Hizmet people. It was often mentioned that they credited their life's work to a plan passed on to them by God as a gift and something to be treasured. Melike and Serkan both mentioned a sense of treasure from God with regard to their children and the safety of their family.

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<sup>51</sup> The test is known as the YKS exam - Yükseköğretim Kurumları Sınavı "Higher Education Institutions Exam" and is required of all students seeking admissions to a university in Türkiye.

## **The Story of Melike and Serkan: Hizmet Educators from Kyrgyzstan to the U.S.**

Melike and Serkan are married and have two teen-age children. The couple met in Kyrgyzstan at a conference for educators in 2002. They taught in separate schools but were in contact with each other, and soon their families met, and they were married in a traditional Turkish wedding a year later. They are both literacy and language specialists and were in Kyrgyzstan working to improve literacy and teach Turkish to the Kyrgyz who commonly study Turkish and Russian due to their physical proximity in the world. Melike taught Turkish language in Kyrgyzstan to high school students. She now teaches Turkish to high school students in a charter school in the Midwest of the United States and wanted to share her story.

### **Melike's Story**

Melike said she was very honored to be asked to share her story and in preparation for her interview wrote the answers to the questions I sent in Turkish. She then invited her son, Cihangir, to join us during the interview on Zoom to act as a translator if there were any problems with language interpretation. Melike's demeanor exuded pride in her son. He was 17 years old and a senior in high school. She brought him and his sister to the U.S. in 2018 and, according to Melike, both had adapted to teen-age life in their new homeland very well. They first settled in a Turkish community living in Washington State and remained there for approximately three years. When Melike was hired to teach at a charter school in the Midwest, the decision was made to allow Cihangir to remain in Washington with a Turkish family to complete his senior year of high school. I asked Cihangir if he was worried or afraid to be in Washington without his family and he said "I am never without my family, I just may not be with them all of the time..." He also said that within a month of this interview he would be leaving for bootcamp because he was joining the Army (the U.S.

Army), he was very much looking forward to the training, and that he would proudly serve this country that had taken his family in and given them a new home. I asked Melike how she felt about his decision and she said she was very happy for him, but that she would miss him very much. She said she knew this was very important for his education and that it was what he wanted to do in his heart.

During the interview, Melike emphasized what she felt was most the important element of teaching was to convey a sense of respect what she described as “etiquette.” In the translation I came to understand she focused on teaching literacy in such a way that the student would understand how to speak and write properly in a polite manner such as to avoid offensive or deficit language. The students in the southern region where they were teaching spoke Kyrgyz which has a Turkic origin. She said the culture in the area where they spent most of their years was quote anti-western which made it an interesting choice for them to come to the U.S. So, I asked her why they chose the U.S. She said first, just because they (the people they were living among) were anti-western, did not mean they felt the same way. Secondly, they had good friends who had already come to the U.S. and had close ties with the Turkish community in various locations throughout the country. Finally, they chose to come to the U.S. because they felt as though their children would have the greatest opportunity and it would be the safest place for them to avoid the Hizmet persecution.

### **From Kyrgyzstan to the U.S.: No Easy Decision**

Soon after the events of the alleged coup in 2016, it became apparent the long arm of the Turkish government could reach into countries including Kyrgyzstan. Serkan said they expected the situation with Erdoğan and the various allegations to be sorted out and things to return to normal in a reasonable amount of time. Both Melike and Serkan said they fully expected the legal system to function properly, the truth would be revealed, and the Hizmet



people would be proven innocent. They never expected the torture and imprisonment to continue for as long as it has and that the people in the government committing these crimes would not be held accountable for their actions. As time passed and conditions worsened, Melike and Serkan became very concerned for the welfare of their children. They devised a plan for Melike to bring the children to the United States on a visitor visa so they could be safe until the situation was resolved. At this point in their lives, they considered Türkiye their homeland, but Kyrgyzstan was their home, the only real home their children had ever known. Melike and Serkan knew the decision to seek refuge in the U.S. was the right one when, Orhan İnandı, the head of Sapat educational network in Kyrgyzstan, was abducted by Turkish Intelligence officials, MIT.

In the RadioFree news article, indicated in the headlines depicted in Figure 3.3, Erdoğan is quoted as saying: "As a result of genuine and patient work, MIT has brought a top Central Asian leader of FETO, Orhan İnandı, to our country to face justice," Erdogan said, referring to the Gülen movement.<sup>52</sup> Another news source goes further to say: "...Erdoğan omitted, however, that Orhan İnandı was kidnapped from Kyrgyzstan, tortured during transportation to Turkey, taken to a MIT 'black site' and tortured there for 37 days.<sup>53</sup> Mr. İnandı has now received a prison sentence of 21 years for his affiliation with the Gülen Movement deemed a terrorist organization by the Erdoğan regime.

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<sup>52</sup> "Kyrgyz Officials Deny Role In Kidnapping Of Educator By Turkish Intelligence," *RadioFreeEurope*, July 8, 2021, <https://www.rferl.org/a/kyrgyzstan-turkey-inandi-disappearance/31347063.html>.

<sup>53</sup> "Kidnapped, Tortured and Locked Away in a Turkish Black Site: Orhan İnandı Case," *Arrested Lawyers Initiative*, September 2, 2022, <https://arrestedlawyers.org/2022/09/02/kidnapped-tortured-and-locked-away-in-a-turkish-black-site-orhan-inandi-case/>.

## Erdogan Says Turkish Agents Abducted Educational Leader In Kyrgyzstan For Alleged Coup Ties



Orhan Inandi, head of Sapat educational network in Kyrgyzstan (file photo)

Figure 3-3: Headlines from RadioFree Europe, July 5, 2021.

Melike and Serkan have sought refuge in the United States as Asylees. Serkan was able to join the family in the U.S. in 2022. By their description, they were once happy living in the beautiful country of Kyrgyzstan and enjoying a very nice life. They were very much engaged in their work with literacy research and education. Fear drove them from their home and forced them to become a part of the diaspora in the U.S. They migrated to an unknown land, sought security in the arms of a small, but close-knit, Turkish community, and have now fully embraced and assimilated into an American lifestyle that allows them the freedom to express their Hizmet values and culture as they choose.

Melike and Serkan are but one of many examples of the Hizmet diaspora created by the Erdoğan regime's desire to purge the Gülen Movement from its existence. This is possibly the clearest example of what can happen when political ideology comes at odds with religious ethics and leadership. In the following chapter, I take a closer look at the events of the past 25 years that have created this pendulous political drama between the politics of the Erdoğan regime and the civil society movement led by Fethullah Gülen.

## CHAPTER 4

### THE ERDOĞAN ERA IN TÜRKİYE

The story of EEK is very interesting. If my Dad had met him, he would likely have said "...he's a man who never lets the grass grow under his feet." EEK is the kind of guy who never sits still for long, so when he was sent to prison he had a choice to make which, for him, was no a choice at all. He is a man who needed to stay busy and productive which he did "in spades," as my Dad would say. Even though he literally was arrested and put on trial as a teacher, he kept right on teaching; his prison cell became his classroom and his fellow prisoners became his students. His only alleged crime was being an outspoken member of the Hizmet Movement, which in the United States (U.S.) may be a right taken for granted. EEK's story is embedded in a chapter that provides a brief description of the political leadership of the Erdoğan era which has its roots in the early 2000s in Türkiye.

#### **The Rise of the AKP**

Recep Tayyip Erdoğan is the face of the Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi (AKP) in Türkiye which, when translated to English, means the "Justice and Development Party."<sup>1</sup> The AKP is a political party that was formed in 2001 after an ideological split in the Refah Partisi (RP), also known in English as the Islamist Welfare Party, which had been banned from Turkish Parliament in 1997 because of its Islam-based activities and involvement.<sup>2</sup> In the years leading up to 2002, Türkiye had evolved into a secular democracy to the extent that

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<sup>1</sup> Sefa Şimşek, "New Social Movements in Turkey Since 1980," *Turkish Studies* 5, no. 2 (2004): 111-139.

<sup>2</sup> Soner Cagaptay, "The November 2002 Elections and Turkey's New Political Era," *Middle East* 6, no. 4 (2002): 43.

public displays of Islam were forbidden.<sup>3</sup> The AKP party's rise to power represented a potentially significant shift in leadership ideology because the members were known to espouse conservative Islamist views.<sup>4</sup> This tension carried over into public sentiment and the election favored a moderate viewpoint that included public expressions of Islam, hence, the AKP party won control of the Turkish government in 2002.<sup>5</sup>

Erdoğan's rise to power and appointment to the position of Prime Minister, however, did not immediately follow the 2002 election and was not without its challenges. In 1998, while Erdoğan was the Mayor of Istanbul, he was convicted of inciting religious hatred. He was charged and convicted of a crime for reciting a religious poem in a public platform (See Figure 4-1 for the text of the poem<sup>6</sup>) which was a violation of Turkish law.<sup>7</sup>

Erdoğan, then Mayor of Istanbul, served four months of a ten-month sentence in a Turkish prison. This conviction made Erdoğan, the Chair of the AKP party, ineligible for membership in Parliament by Article 109 of the Turkish Constitution thereby preventing him

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<sup>3</sup> Khash Hemmati, "Turkey Post 1980 Coup D'état: The Rise, the Fall, and the Emergence of Political Islam," *Illumine: Journal of the Centre for Studies in Religion and Society* 12, no. 1 (2013): 58-73.

<sup>4</sup> Fait Muedini, "The Politics Between the Justice and Development Party (AKP) and the Gülen Movement in Turkey: Issues of Human Rights and Rising Authoritarianism," *Muslim World Journal of Human Rights*, 12, no. 1 (2015): 99-122.

<sup>5</sup> Julius Motal, "Recep Tayyip Erdoğan: More Than a Lame Duck," CUNY Academic Works/Capstones, 2014, [https://academicworks.cuny.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1033&context=gj\\_etds](https://academicworks.cuny.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1033&context=gj_etds).

<sup>6</sup> The poem by Ziya Gökalp was reprinted in the article by James Ryan, however, it is commonly familiar among Turkish people, and often recited by school children. James Ryan, "A Poetic Conviction? Turkish Courts Sentence Istanbul Mayor for Speech Crime," *Foreign Policy Research Institute*, December 19, 2022, <https://www.fpri.org/article/2022/12/a-poetic-conviction-turkish-courts-sentence-istanbul-mayor-for-speech-crime/>.

<sup>7</sup> Hakkı Taş, "The Chronopolitics of National Populism," *Identities* 29, no. 2 (2022): 127-145.

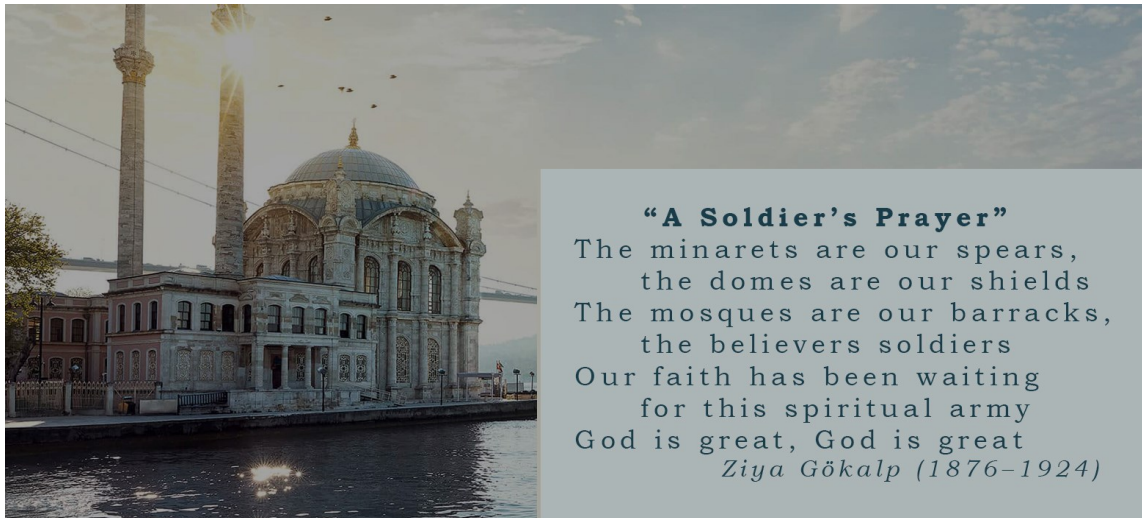


Figure 4-1: A Soldier's Prayer - The poem by Ziya Gökalp recited by Erdoğan at a political rally in 1997.

from being appointed to the position of Prime Minister. Membership in Parliament was a requirement for Erdoğan to be seated as the Prime Minister. In 2003, after a series of political maneuvers focused on grooming Turkey for the European Union (EU) accession process, Article 76 of the Turkish Constitution was amended, and unanimously passed, which “rehabilitated all people stripped of their political rights.”<sup>8</sup> This act cleared the conviction from Erdoğan’s record and paved the way for him to officially ascend to the position of Prime Minister as the one who had been duly elected as the head of the AKP Party. At that time, Erdoğan publicly professed the country should be led toward a European style democracy that emphasized inclusivity and the decentralization of power.<sup>9</sup> Lancaster described the early years of the AKP party as “fully committed to intra-party democracy”

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<sup>8</sup> Soner Cagaptay, "The November 2002 Elections and Turkey's New Political Era," *Middle East* 6, no. 4 (2002): 44.

<sup>9</sup> Caroline Lancaster, “The Iron Law of Erdogan: The Decay from Intra-Party Democracy to Personalistic Rule,” *Third World Quarterly* 35, no. 9 (2014): 1672-1690.

which she described as reflective of respect for the democratic process.<sup>10</sup> However, what Erdoğan said publicly perhaps did not reflect his inner beliefs and motivations. Erdoğan is quoted as once having said “Democracy is like a train. We shall get out when we arrive at the station we want.”<sup>11</sup> This quote revealed his internal desire to lead the country with an appearance of democracy for as long as it took the country in the direction he, and the AKP, wanted it to go.

Over the course of the fifteen to twenty years following his rise to power, Erdoğan appears to have followed the transition from democratic to an oligarchic or authoritarian leader as foretold of potentially all unchecked powers in leadership by Robert Michels in the early 1900s. Michels asserted, given the opportunity, all who begin with the ideal of democratic leadership naturally succumb to the transition to oligarchic rule over the course of time:

The most restricted form of oligarchy, absolute monarchy, is founded upon the will of a single individual... One commands, all others obey. The will of one single individual can countervail the will of the nation... At the antipodes of the monarchical principal, in theory stands democracy, denying the right of one over others. It makes all citizens equal before the law... a social group which had secured control of the instruments of collective power would do all that was possible to retain that control. Theophrastus noted long ago that the strongest desire of men who have attained to leadership in a popularly governed state is not so much the acquirement of personal wealth as the gradual establishment of their own sovereignty at the expense of popular sovereignty... the formation of oligarchies within the various forms of democracy is the outcome of organic necessity...<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid, 1673.

<sup>11</sup> Aram Bakshian, "Erdogan, the Anti-Ataturk," *The National Interest* 127 (2013): 63.

<sup>12</sup> Robert Michels, *Political Parties: A Sociological Study of the Oligarchical Tendencies of Modern Democracy*, tr. Eden and Cedar Paul. (New York, Hearst's International Library Co. 1915), 1, 385, 402.

Erdoğan is a charismatic leader who presents himself as a patriarchal figure representing the idyllic face of Turkic Islamic nationalism which is popular among mainstream Turkic culture.<sup>13</sup> In truth, Erdoğan is the embodiment of Michels' theory contrived nearly 100 years prior to the events unfolding.

White described Erdoğan as “a pious Muslim Turk whose subjectivity and vision for the future is shaped an imperial Ottoman past overlaid into a republican framework, but divorced from the Kemalist project.”<sup>14</sup> Erdoğan is a man raised in a traditional Islamic family who grew into leader immersed in Ottoman culture and history and who committed his entire life's work to leading the Republic of Turkey. He is quoted as having said:

During my primary school years, I was not in politics. All I did was build a substructure for politics in the future. When I started high school, I began to participate in more of these activities. I took part in all of the school's cultural and sport activities. When I finished high school, I found myself active in politics.<sup>15</sup>

In 2017, fifteen years following the democratic election of the AKP party to rule the Turkish Parliament, a referendum was proposed by the AKP to revise the Constitution which was a rather clear indication of an impending shift from democracy to authoritarian rule. One of the revisions eliminated the role of Prime Minister and established the position of presidency which elevated the power and authority of Erdoğan to President.<sup>16</sup> This meant

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<sup>13</sup> Howard Eissenstat, "Recep Tayyip Erdoğan: From 'Illiberal Democracy' to Electoral Authoritarianism," in *Dictators and Autocrats* (Routledge, 2021), 367-383.

<sup>14</sup> Jenny White, *Muslim Nationalism and the New Turks* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), 9.

<sup>15</sup> Giray Saynur Derman, and O. B. A. Hande, "Making a Determination from the Operational Code of a New and Influential Actor: President of Turkey Recep Tayyip Erdogan," *Bilig* 79 (2016): 53.

<sup>16</sup> Amelia Sullivan, "Unconditional Surrender: The Rise of President Erdogan and the End of Kemalist Turkey," *History in the Making* 11, no. 1 (2018): 1-36.



that, although still formally elected, Erdoğan's power and control over the country were greatly expanded in his role as president and his ruling authority remained unchecked.

### **Rising Authoritarianism – 21st Century Politics in Türkiye**

Erdoğan's leadership in the AKP since the elections of 2002 in the Turkish political realm has been described as overt "rising authoritarianism."<sup>17</sup> At the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, Türkiye was considered a model for middle eastern (Islamic<sup>18</sup>) democracy because it espoused a desire to assimilate into Western and European expectations of political processes. Eissenstat describes the shift from a simply flawed democracy to "outright authoritarianism" as having occurred with "shocking speed."<sup>19</sup> Beken Saatçioğlu referred to this process as the "de-Europeanisation of Turkey;" more specifically a series of legislative shifts and judicial reforms introduced by the Erdoğan regime leading the country away from democracy toward authoritarian rule and distancing Türkiye from alignment with European values.<sup>20</sup> Perhaps the most dangerous component of this movement toward authoritarian leadership was the consequence to the voices of dissent.

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<sup>17</sup> Fait Muedini, "The Politics Between the Justice and Development Party (AKP) and the Gülen Movement in Turkey: Issues of Human Rights and Rising Authoritarianism," *Muslim World Journal of Human Rights*, 12, no. 1 (2015): 100.

<sup>18</sup> In my opinion, the term "middle east" and "middle eastern" is often used a pejorative term to mean countries with Islamic-based legal systems and governments, and has become a form of deficit language. The term carries with it a negative sense of a rule of law lacking in democratic voice.

<sup>19</sup> Howard Eissenstat, "Recep Tayyip Erdoğan: From "Illiberal Democracy" to Electoral Authoritarianism (Born 1953)," in *Dictators and Autocrats*, p. 367

<sup>20</sup> Beken Saatçioğlu, "De-Europeanisation in Turkey: The Case of the Rule of Law," *South European Society and Politics* 21, no. 1 (2016): 133-146.

## Events Leading up to the Alleged Coup Attempt

Although initially in the 1990s and early 2000s the AKP and the Gülen Movement had differing motivations and agendas, they had shared synergistic vision with regard to building a successful and thriving nation. The vision was that of a democratic nation embraced and perceived by the “west” as modern, which for Turkey meant inclusion in the European Union and an acknowledgment on the world stage as a democratic Islamic nation. This modern vision of a political democracy aligned with the Gülen Movement’s desire to develop a civil society bolstered by a strong sense of moral character enriched by an ethical code rooted in Islam. The enthusiastic hope was that the world would see that Islam and democracy were not mutually exclusive.<sup>21</sup>

Members of the AKP and the Gülen Movement were often indistinguishable in many instances because they were not mutually exclusive groups. The alignment of the AKP and Gülen Movement demonstrated a commitment to a moderate form of Islam that would lead the country to a modernity recognized by Europe as a beacon of Islamic democracy and justice.<sup>22</sup> In the early years of the Erdoğan era, many followers of the Gülen Movement (Gülenists) were appointed to state agencies, and ranking military and judicial positions.<sup>23</sup> Although suspicious of the Gülenists, the AKP embraced Hizmet concepts and worked to advance humanitarian causes and extinguish extremist opposition in a mutually beneficial

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<sup>21</sup> Reuven Firestone, "Conspiracy to Prove a Conspiracy: My Meeting with Fethullah Gülen," *Occasional Papers on Religion in Eastern Europe* 37, no. 2 (2017): 49-53.

<sup>22</sup> Howard Eissenstat, "Uneasy Rests the Crown: Erdoğan and ‘Revolutionary Security’ In Turkey," *Project on Middle East Democracy*, December 2017.

<sup>23</sup> Murat Somer, "Turkey: The Slippery Slope from Reformist to Revolutionary Polarization and Democratic Breakdown," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 681, no. 1 (2019): 42-61.

relationship.<sup>24</sup> In 1999, a video surfaced wherein Gülen allegedly called upon the Hizmet community to work within the system of government (Turkish government) to bring about his vision of justice. Gülen insists the video was altered and he never made the statement.<sup>25</sup>

Gülen frequently called for the cleansing of systemic corruption which led to the Erdoğan and the AKP interpreting these actions as competitive threats. In a BBC interview at the home of Gülen in Pennsylvania, BBC Newshour correspondent Tim Franks referred to this phenomenon as an “overlap of ambitions” between the two men.<sup>26</sup> In 1999, as tensions rose within Türkiye, Gülen chose a self-imposed exile in the U.S. where he now continues to reside.<sup>27</sup>

The Gülenists were known to challenge policies that were unfair and unjust from the lens of Islamic values, such as issues related to the fair treatment of minorities, including the treatment of Kurdish people.<sup>28</sup> As the Erdoğan regime moved toward authoritarian rule, its motives and intentions tended toward perpendicular purposes with Gülenist philosophy and commitment to a moral compass governed by a fair and equitable legal system within democratic society. The issue was especially visible in the legal policies and treatment of the

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<sup>24</sup> Hakkı Taş, "A History of Turkey's AKP-Gülen Conflict," *Mediterranean Politics* 23, no. 3 (2018): 395-402.

<sup>25</sup> Peter Beaumont, "Who Is the Man Turkey's President Blames for the Coup Attempt?" *The Guardian*, July 16, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jul/16/fethullah-gulen-who-is-the-man-blamed-by-turkeys-president-for-coup-attempt#:~:text=The%20accusation%20by%20Turkey's%20president,there%20any%20truth%20in%20it%3F>.

<sup>26</sup> Tim Franks, "Fethullah Gülen: Powerful but Reclusive Turkish Cleric," *BBC*, January 27, 2014, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-25885817>.

<sup>27</sup> Fait Muedini, "The Politics Between the Justice and Development Party (AKP) and the Gülen Movement in Turkey: Issues of Human Rights and Rising Authoritarianism," *Muslim World Journal of Human Rights* 12, no. 1 (2015): 99-122.

<sup>28</sup> James L. Crawford, "The Continued Persecution of the Kurdish People in Turkey," *American Indian Law Review* 45, no. 2 (2020): 327-359.

Kurdish people living in the south eastern and south-central region of the country. It was reported, in a number of outlets, that violence was often escalated in the form of “torture, beatings, disappearances, extra-judicial killings, deaths in custody, indiscriminate or arbitrary murders, detentions and arrests” and directed toward the Kurdish people living in Türkiye.<sup>29</sup> Members of the Gülen Movement were known to speak out against the injustice, but have always maintained a commitment to non-violence in their response to these issues.

The Kurdish people are the fourth largest ethnic group in the Middle East and the largest minority group in Türkiye.<sup>30</sup> In 2007, the Partiya Karkeran Kurdista (the PKK, Kurdistan Worker’s Party) was a coalition of Kurdish people from Turkey, Iran, Syria and Iraq that had emerged in the 1980s as a response to disturbing and threatening regional conflicts.<sup>31</sup> This coalition was identified as a terrorist organization because of its tactics in responding to acts of violence perpetrated by government forces and military combatants against the Kurdish people.

A precursor to the coming rift in the relationship between the Erdoğan regime and the Gülenists occurred in 2007. An incident occurred wherein a crate of grenades was discovered in an Istanbul suburb and was dubbed by the military as the Ergenekon investigation and case.<sup>32</sup> Within four years, a group labeled the Ergenekon Terrorist Organization with over 300 members were charged and held responsible for related incidents by the military

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<sup>29</sup> Christopher Houston, *Islam, Kurds and the Turkish Nation State* (Routledge, 2020).

<sup>30</sup> Callimanopulos Dominique, “Kurdish Repression in Turkey,” *Cultural Survival*, February 9, 2010, <https://www.culturalsurvival.org/publications/cultural-survival-quarterly/kurdish-repression-turkey>.

<sup>31</sup> Taha Özhan, and Hatem Ete, "A New Agenda for the Kurdish Question," *Insight Turkey* (2009): 97-114.

<sup>32</sup> Gareth Jenkins, "Ergenekon, Sledgehammer, and the Politics of Turkish Justice: Conspiracies and Coincidences," *Meria Journal* 15, no. 2 (2011): 1-9.

investigators and, at the time, were alleged to be members of the Gülen Movement. Ties to the Gülen Movement were based on secret witnesses and alleged confessions of those who were charged, allegations of disinformation and partisan media accounts were rampant throughout the coverage of the incident.<sup>33</sup> The connection between the Ergenekon Terrorist Organization and the Gülen Movement were never substantiated, but an undercurrent of conspiracy theories and suspicion was fomenting under the surface of the relationship between the Gülenists and the Erdoğan regime. While it is true that the Gülenists would have resisted any violence or injustices against the Kurdish people; it is also true the Gülenists, by their very nature, would not have engaged in violent acts as a response to the injustices. Gülen, himself, is an absolute advocate for peace, tolerance and peaceful co-existence.<sup>34</sup>

### **2013 Corruption Scandal**

In December 2013, a major criminal investigation by Istanbul district prosecutors culminated in the arrest and detention of some 50 individuals closely tied to high-level government positions in Türkiye. The investigation involved construction and real estate dealings tied to alleged money laundering that extended beyond the borders of Türkiye to other Arab and Muslim nations including Iran, Iraq and India.<sup>35</sup> The AKP leadership quickly reacted to the disclosure of the investigation and the subsequent arrests by describing this as

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<sup>33</sup> Ali Balci, "A Trajectory of Competing Narratives: The Turkish Media Debate Ergenekon," *Mediterranean Quarterly* 21, no. 1 (2010): 76-100.

<sup>34</sup> Karina Korostelina, "Redefining 'Us' and 'Them': Gülen's Approach to Transformation of Perceptions Between Muslims and Non-Muslims," In "Proceedings of the Conference *Islam in the Age of Global Challenges: Alternative Perspectives of the Gülen Movement, Speaker Biographies and Conference Proceedings* (Washington DC: Rumi Forum, 2008), 456-473.

<sup>35</sup> Fevzi Bilgin, "Turkey Brief: Corruption Scandal and Ensuing Political Crisis," Washington, DC: Rethink Institute (2014): 1-4.

an attempt by outside forces including the United States and Israel in collusion with “Turkish collaborators” also known as members of the Gülen Movement, to overthrow and oust the AKP. <sup>36</sup> The Istanbul-based Journalists and Writers Foundation<sup>37</sup> said in a statement that:

“Claims that our honorary president, Fethullah Gülen, and the Hizmet movement are ‘linked to the prosecutors’ conducting the graft probe or that they made the prosecutors launch the investigations because they are the cat's paws of external powers are heinous slander.” The statement also challenged the government, stating that “a parallel state is unacceptable in a democratic country. If there really is such a parallel network, the government must produce evidence of it.”<sup>38</sup>

The outcome of this corruption scandal is immaterial to this research except that it signified the tip of the iceberg that sank the ship of the relationship between the Gülenists and the Erdoğan regime. There simply did not appear to be a means to repairing the relationship going forward, and the Erdoğan regime’s response to the Academics for Peace petition signatories was a foreshadowing of a much greater assertion of power for the preservation of the AKP’s authoritarian grasp of control over the narrative of the country.

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<sup>36</sup> Ergun Özbudun, "AKP at the Crossroads: Erdoğan's Majoritarian Drift," *South European Society and Politics* 19, no. 2 (2014): 155-167.

<sup>37</sup> The Journalists and Writers Foundation originated in Turkey but is no longer based in Türkiye because the Erdoğan regime considers it a terroristic threat due to its positions of dissent to the current administration. It is now based in New York, NY, USA, and continues its work which can be found online at <https://jwf.org/> Its stated purpose is: “The Journalists and Writers Foundation (JWF) is an international civil society organization dedicated to the culture of peace, human rights and sustainable development. JWF promotes diversity and inclusion by creating forums for intellectual and social engagement, generates and shares knowledge with stakeholders, builds partnerships worldwide and develops policy recommendations for positive social change.”

<sup>38</sup> Fevzi Bilgin, "Turkey Brief: Corruption Scandal and Ensuing Political Crisis," Washington, DC: Rethink Institute (2014): 3.

### **Academics for Peace Petition**

The Academics for Peace (AFP) organization issued a petition entitled “We will not be a party to this crime” in January 2016.<sup>39</sup> It specifically called out the Erdoğan regime and demanded a stop to human rights violations against the Kurdish people who primarily reside in southeastern area of Turkey. The Kurdish issue in Türkiye had been an ongoing topic of human rights discussions for more than 30 years. The Kurdistan Worker’s Party (the PKK) had been engaged in a violent struggle with the Turkish government since the 1980s over demands for fairness and equity for Kurdish people living in central and southern Türkiye.<sup>40</sup> In December 2015, Erdoğan publicly vowed to “annihilate” the PKK in response to an uprising in Cizre and Silopi which had been placed under a curfew.<sup>41</sup> The AFP released the petition in response to the ongoing violence between the Erdoğan regime and the PKK.

A number of academics, 1,128 educators, signed the petition and were accused of treason and disloyalty to the State by the Erdogan Regime and summarily discharged from their teaching positions, including the dismissal of professors at 89 universities within the country.<sup>42</sup> Figure 4-2 is a data chart that indicates some of the early data from the dismissals

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<sup>39</sup> Bahar Baser, Samim Akgönül, and Ahmet Erdi Öztürk, “‘Academics for Peace’ in Turkey: A Case of Criminalising Dissent and Critical Thought via Counterterrorism Policy,” *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 10, no. 2 (2017): 274-296.

<sup>40</sup> Gallia Lindenstrauss, “Back to Square One? The Collapse of the Peace Process with the Kurds in Turkey,” *Strategic Assessment* 18, no. 4 (2016): 97-106.

<sup>41</sup> Seyhmus Cakan, “Erdoğan says Turkey to Annihilate Kurdish Militants, 25 Killed,” *Reuters* (December 17, 2015), <https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-turkey-kurds/erdogan-says-turkey-to-annihilate-kurdish-militants-25-killed-idUKKBN0U00Q620151217>.

<sup>42</sup> Tahir Abbas, and Anja Zalta, “‘You Cannot Talk about Academic Freedom in Such an Oppressive Environment’: Perceptions of the We Will Not Be a Party to This Crime! Petition Signatories” *Turkish Studies* 18, no. 4 (2017): 624-643.

<b>Positions/Titles of Academics for Peace signatories who are resigned / forced to resign + retired / forced to retire + dismissed + removed and banned from public service with the decree laws</b>	
<b>Position</b>	<b>Count</b>
Research Assistant (the majority of which are PhD students)	184
Asst. Prof.	125
Prof.	97
Assoc. Prof.	72
Lecturer	39
Dr.	13
Expert	8
Instructor	6
PhD Student	2
Teacher	2
Unknown	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>549</b>

Figure 4-2: Positions of Academics who were dismissed following the AFP Petition.

and trials of the academicians who signed the petition.<sup>43</sup> The numbers in the chart somewhat conflict with the data Abbas used in his report, however, Abbas used data from 2017 which is one year later. In my opinion, for this document, the slight difference in numbers is irrelevant because the point is that many academics were imprisoned for expressing an opinion in opposition to the government. The academics in Türkiye were not and are not free to express an opinion in dissent of the government and the cost to do is very high.

The academics were accused in Turkish Court of “Making Propaganda for a Terrorist Organisation” based on Article 7/2 of the Turkish Anti-Terror Act.<sup>44</sup> However, recently progress has been made on some of their cases which has led to a greater sense of optimism. The following is a statement published on a watchdog website, “Scholars at Risk Network:”

UPDATE: On July 26, 2019, Turkey’s Constitutional Court ruled in a nine-to-eight decision that the conviction of ten academics for their endorsement of the petition

<sup>43</sup> “Rights Violations Against ‘Academics for Peace,’” Academics for Peace, last updated October 12, 2023, <https://barisicinakademisyenler.net/node/314>.

<sup>44</sup> See Appendix E: Anti-Terror Law NR. 3713 for a translated copy of the text of the law.



violated their right to freedom of expression. The court ordered that lower courts conduct retrials and that the defendants be paid 9,000 lira (roughly \$1,595 USD) in compensation. By October 2019, more than three hundred Peace Petition signatories had reportedly been acquitted. Despite this positive development, the prosecutions and other actions targeting the Academics for Peace have nevertheless had a devastating impact on the academics themselves and academic expression and inquiry in Turkey more broadly.<sup>45</sup>

Ub and EEK both believe strongly in the rule of law and in the Turkish legal system and feel that justice will win out. They believe they will be relieved of the burden of what they consider to be serious injustice at the hand of a few misguided government officials wielding a great amount of power.

### **EEK's Story**

EEK is an outspoken academic with a strong commitment to social justice advocacy, especially related to issues involving the fair and equitable treatment of the Kurdish people. Let me begin this story by saying, EEK is a man who is filled with more grace than any man I have ever had the honor to meet (and, I have met many honorable men). EEK is 49 years old and, although he has never been convicted of a crime, he was released from detention after being detained in a Turkish prison for five years and six months. I spoke to him shortly after he was released from detention. EEK and his wife have been married for 17 years and are devout Hizmet people. They had spent their whole adult lives living a simple and seemingly uncomplicated life devoted to their young family. It was about six and a half years ago when their lives were “turned inside the other way.” EEK is studying English and in the interview was trying to say their lives were turned “upside-down” and laughed at himself when he could not remember the phrase. His sense of humor is delightful, especially in the

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<sup>45</sup> “Peace Petition Scholars, Turkey,” Scholars At Risk Network, <https://www.scholarsatrisk.org/actions/academics-for-peace-turkey/>.

context of his recent past life experiences. After all of the hardship EEK has endured, he has the innate ability to laugh and find joy in simple things. I asked him why it was important for him to share his story in this research project and he said: “I have to share, I think, because so many people need to hear.”<sup>46</sup>

EEK was a math teacher at a high school in Türkiye. One day, without warning, arrest warrants were issued, and the school where EEK taught was shut down without notice. This took place in the Fall following the alleged coup attempt in July 2016; the staff and faculty were all arrested, charged and detained due to the school’s affiliation with Hizmet. It was also alleged that someone from the school had been a signatory to the Academics for Peace petition in January 2016 which further tied the school to an alleged terroristic threat to the government. I asked EEK why he believed he had been arrested and he said: “...I did not remain silent against corruption as I witnessed it.” EEK said that his teaching license was one of more than 70,000 licenses that were cancelled by the government in this sweep of academics in the Fall of 2016.

*EEK: You know, this time was very serious in the country. You know, I was speaking up and asking what wrong were we doing? We are people dedicated to doing good works. It seems whenever you try to do good works, it makes other people uncomfortable...”*

I pressed him further to talk about not remaining silent against the corruption and why he felt like he was targeted.

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<sup>46</sup> I interviewed EEK in June 2023 which is one year after his release from prison. The initials used are a pseudonym because he remains in Türkiye and his case is still pending before the Turkish courts.

*EEK: Why do I think I was arrested? Frankly, it has always been like this in history. Be it in Christianity or in Islam, I don't know how right it would be to speak about this, but there has always been barriers put in front of people trying to do good. If you too are trying to do good things with other people in an organized manner, of course, when you interfere with the interests of others or when you try to interfere with other people doing bad things, then of course you will be faced with them and to get rid of your actions they will get rid of you. Our situation, my situation, happened like that. While trying to do good things, this became a disadvantage to people doing bad things, they tried to get rid of us - I don't know how it can be expressed... if we had not done that (not gotten involved) no one would've said anything. But when we said this is wrong, this is robbery, this is against Islam, against humanity, and when people struggled to bring this to light, and then of course, I was targeted. I went to trial three times and could not get a lawyer. According to the law, they gave me a free lawyer from the bar, but he said to me, "Go get yourself a lawyer." Of course, it didn't help at all because I couldn't give money... they took everything we had, and I had no job so where would I get the money to give for a lawyer?*

I asked EEK "Can we call you an activist?" and he replied:

*EEK: Every Hizmet man is essentially an activist.*

*Kari: Why do you say that?*

*EEK: Because we cannot just sit still when injustice is happening, we must use our voice to speak up for others when they cannot.*

Figure 4-3 is a photo of the outside of the prison in Manisa where EEK was detained for five and half years. I asked EEK to continue the story. “So, after you were arrested, what happened?”



Figure 4-3: Picture of prison where EEK was detained.

*EEK: They gathered us all up and took us there. They put so many of us in the block (prison cell) there wasn't even room for us to sleep on the floor. We had to take sleeping in shifts. The blocks were made for 10 men, but we were 30 in one place and there were only 10 beds. They gave us food, but it was not good food and because of it I got a serious stomach sickness. I wasn't eating because the foods were very bad. They gave food but it wasn't being eaten because it was very bad. I lost a lot of weight while I was there. The conditions were not designed for humans to have dignity. For example, there was one shower and one toilet so 30 people we were waiting 40-45 minutes in line to use the bathroom. To shower and use the bathroom*

*we hung up a paper and went in order. Or else you would never get a turn. In the winter it was very difficult because they would not turn on the heaters and we had no coats or things to keep warm. The jail was new, but the heater wouldn't be turned on. According to Manisa's weather, in summer and winter, the temperature in the prison would always be five degrees higher. So, if it was five degrees in winter than it would be 10 degrees inside the prison.<sup>47</sup> In the summer if it was 40 degrees outside it would be 45 degrees inside. They especially wouldn't work the heaters.*

*There was nothing for us to do so we started to study and pray.*

Kari: "What did you study?"

*EEK: Oh, yes, we took our lessons in the Holy Qur'an... we studied day and night the Qur'an and Tafsir (commentary to the Qur'an) and the guards could not prevent us from doing these things. Then we started to get a few books and things from the library... the guards thought it was better to keep us occupied so we would not cause them troubles. We also had lots of things to study. Some studied math, some studied English, German, French, computer science, and the librarian couldn't catch up to bring all of our books. He would come and say this, "I've never worked as much as I did bringing books to you guys. In my job as a guardian I've worked the hardest in your time, because books are coming once a week or once every 15 days. Sometimes it wouldn't even come for a month. Everyone asked for four to five books*

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<sup>47</sup> Five degrees Celsius equals 41 degrees Fahrenheit, 10 degrees Celsius equals 50 degrees Fahrenheit. 40 degrees Celsius equals 104 degrees Fahrenheit

*each and we would take turns reading all of the books.”<sup>48</sup> (I asked him to clarify what he meant - this was an unusual practice, most men either did not read or only requested one book at a time).*

*Then actually, I don't know how it would be to explain this but, before we were in separate wards from the other accused criminals, then after some time we were mixed up, the reason for this mixing wasn't with good intentions. You get the idea. They brought us (the Hizmet members and criminals) together to hurt us. But later, they began to say, “We thought you people were terrorists but you guys actually aren't,” the situation was actually very different.*

I clarified through the interpreter what EEK meant in his statement above. When the group was first detained, they were all taken together to a prison in Manisa and held in adjacent cells together in a block. The cells were over crowded, but the men shared common backgrounds; they were teachers and administrators from Hizmet schools. It was not difficult for them to form a bond and work together because many of them knew each other already or because their shared values enabled them to find common ground. At some point, after several months of detention (EEK was uncertain of the timeline) the prison administration decided the experience of prison had become too easy for these men. The men appeared too comfortable even in these poor conditions. The guards, however, appreciated the situation because the men posed no trouble for them. The men were cooperative and easy to supervise. A decision was made by the prison administration to transfer and disburse the Hizmet

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<sup>48</sup> The guard's complaint suggests that the volume of books requested was a much greater number than other inmates had requested in the past and EEK was conveying the level of surprise the guard was sharing. Apparently, even though it was more work for the guard, the books were delivered and not withheld.

prisoners to cell blocks mixed among other criminals. When they did this, an unexpected thing occurred.

*Kari: EEK, what happened after they transferred you to the general population?*

*EEK: They put me in with the others and at first, I did not know any of them. Then I asked for the books to be sent and I began to study as before. The other men were curious, and I started to talk with them then the next thing they wanted to learn what I was doing. Well the others, like the criminals, like those that came from robbery, drugs, or other crimes, would ask, "How do you guys spend your time like this?" and we would say the time wasn't enough for us. Why? because you're (we are) reading the Qur'an and the people trying to do memorization, try to develop yourself (ourselves). We saw that we lacked a lot, there was a lot we didn't know. We didn't know this, and we didn't know that. They (the men he now shared the cell with) wanted to know more about the Holy Qur'an and our prayers. Everything I have been given comes from Allah and must be passed on to the next man, Insh'Allah. I am Hizmet man, and I believe education is a solution to many problems we face in society. I offered to help them, and we started having classes from the very beginning, you know. It was very basic; I am a math teacher, but we had to also start with reading and other topics. They were in prison because they were thieves but what else could they do? The prison tried to take away our dignity, but Allah gave us the opportunity to raise each other up. They wanted to demoralize us, but then they saw it went the other way.*

EEK, essentially, set up a “Madrese-i Yusuf” or “School of Yusuf” (in English) within the prison where he was detained.<sup>49</sup> For the duration of his detention, he never stopped studying and teaching because he believed Allah had called him to do so. School of Yusuf is not something that can be found in research or in any formal organization. Yusuf’un Okulu is a Turkish term used to describe a person who has been unjustly imprisoned, follows the teaching of the Qur’an and instructs others in the ways of Islam. It is a Turkish expression that is derived from lore associated with the Prophet Yusuf who is said to have been unjustly imprisoned and eventually released when the truth was confessed by his accuser.<sup>50</sup> Many of the Hizmet detainees were Yusuf’un Okulu during their time in the prison. Figure 4-4<sup>51</sup> is one of a number of drawings published by an artist who was imprisoned in a similar circumstance to EEK and has since been released from detention. It shows the men sitting around the table studying together.<sup>52</sup>

In the description of the drawing Yolgezer said:

Like in the other wards, no time was wasted in our ward, either. Some would study, some would read Quran or other books, some would recite prayers using the prayer beads they made from olive seeds. Everyone was busy with something. There were even some friends who taught lessons from their own fields of expertise. For example, some of the classes you could attend in Ward C-7 included English, Arabic, religious principles, and subjects like math, physics, chemistry and even medicine. There were so many teachers in that tiny workshop of ours. Even I gave art lessons

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<sup>49</sup> Yusuf is a name commonly translated to Joseph in English from the Hebrew scriptures. In the Qur’an, Joseph is first translated from Hebrew, יוסף, to Arabic, يُوسُفُ, and then into Turkish as Yusuf which is a common name among men in Türkiye. Google Translate.

<sup>50</sup> “Full Story of Prophet Yusuf in Islam (PBUH),” *My Islam*, <https://myislam.org/prophet-yusuf/>.

<sup>51</sup> See Appendix F: Permissions Granted for Use, for the permission from the publisher, AST, to use the drawing from Yolgezer’s book.

<sup>52</sup> Yolgezer, *A Picture is Worth a Thousand Words: The Illustrations of a Teacher in Prison* (AST Publishing, 2021), 62. Permission to reprint granted by AST publishing.



while in there... These pictures you are looking at would never have existed if I had not been arrested...<sup>53</sup>



Figure 4-4: Drawing made by the artist, Yolgezer, while he was imprisoned. He later published his drawings and descriptions of the works.

In his book, Yolgezer's drawings and descriptions of his time in the prison mirror EEK's story in many ways. EEK took the concept of the School of Yusuf one step further while he was detained because he did not simply study with other Hizmet men; he made the connection with prisoners outside of his faith-base and comfort zone. I asked EEK if he felt like it made any difference to the men who were convicted criminals and he said:

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<sup>53</sup> Yolgezer, *A Picture is Worth a Thousand Words: The Illustrations of a Teacher in Prison* (AST Publishing, 2021), 62 -63. Yolgezer and EEK were initially in the same prison before EEK was transferred.

*EEK: Every man deserves to have his chance to improve himself. Allah never stops having a belief in us until we take our last breath and return to him. Allah believed in me and knew I was an innocent man who spoke up for those who needed it and I was put in this place for a reason. It was very hard for me and my family but there was no reason to sit and do nothing. Allah had bigger expectations of me and what could I do?*

*Kari: Did you have contact with your family while you were detained?*

*EEK: My wife was eventually allowed to visit every two months and we could have a 10-minute phone call each week. When I was arrested, she was left to care for our three small children. My big son was eight, the middle one was my daughter and she was four, and the baby son was two years old only. My oldest son said after I was released and came home that when they arrested me he thought I must be a vicious murderer like in the movies, but now it has been explained to him and he understands better. It hurt me very deeply to know that my son had these thoughts and that I could not correct them for him.*

*My wife had her own troubles while I was away, and she did not immediately tell me about it because she did not want me to worry about it. My wife was a health care administrator and some months after I was arrested, they came for her too. They arrested her and held her for four days, but they released her because there was no one to care for our children. She was sentenced to six years and ten months and it was deferred until after my release. So far, they have not come for her, but we do not know when they are coming.*

*Kari: What was it like for you when you were released?*

*EEK: ...something happened about my release I don't know how I'll explain but while I was inside during the time close to my release I imagined what I'll do when I'm released, what I'll do with my kids, for my family, and I'm going to try to do these things I couldn't do, (he clarified what he meant as imagining all of the things he could not do with his family for the duration of his detention) while many people were making these plans in their head, (he clarified that everyone he was with in the prison had plans for what they would do with their family when they were released – it was the thing that gave them hope for the future) my last day on June 10 around 12-1 p.m. right when I was being released, my brother who was in the same situation and went through similar things as I did, his wife (EEK's brother's wife)<sup>54</sup> had given birth three to four days prior and near my release time she passed away from a heart attack after the birth. She was around 36-37 years old when that happened, this was unbelievable because she was a very healthy woman but when she was in the prison something broke inside of her and she was not the same when she came out. (The baby was delivered at approximately 29 weeks which is premature – a normal pregnancy is 40 weeks. The baby spent time in the neonatal intensive care unit in the hospital and EEK's wife stayed at the hospital with the baby until the baby was released.)*

*I was expecting my children to greet me after my release like with many families, I was expecting my family to greet me but when she (the sister-in-law) passed away near my release time, when I was released I didn't find anyone waiting*

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<sup>54</sup> EEK's brother's wife was a teacher and had been detained in a different prison and had been detained 55 months, and had been released a year prior to EEK's release.

*for me. I found out everyone went to the funeral, after that, I don't know if I was happy with being released, to be honest, I didn't feel any happiness, because my brother's wife also was in prison for four and a half years and was released and got a pregnant and six months later they delivered the baby in emergency, and three days later she passed away on the day of my release. Therefore, the time after I was released after June 10, I couldn't visit my children properly or take care of my wife or children. I think I was able to hug my kids one day after – I remember being able to hug my kids one day after I was released. Therefore, that situation made my test much harder, imprisonment was nothing compared to this.*

*My wife was at the hospital with the baby who was so fragile and barely living. My children hardly recognized me because I was away for so long. My father cried. I never see him cry but this was too great for him. All these things. Now because of all these things I am not able to work as a teacher, so I am doing construction and taking classes online to try to find whatever I can do. We are living in my father's house and the baby is with us. He is one years old now and walking and doing all of the normal things a baby does. My children are in school and growing so very quickly and we are reacquainted. My son had some problems. Our oldest son was eight when I was arrested. My wife told me, he made lots of trouble and started misbehaving and having a bad temper at home, he started hitting and breaking things. Then I told my wife to take him to a child counselor and she found a known psychologist from one of our friends in Izmir, someone who knew about this. He said the child's bad temper and misbehavior was from their father not being home it would have to be like so and so. He said that rather than being closed off it's better*

*that the child was showing his trouble in the outside. They went to a few sessions which was really beneficial, and my son improved but of course it was very difficult for my wife to manage all of this without me to help her. But of course, they all lived a trauma from not having their father home.*

*What I am most scared of now is that they will come for my wife. She has a sentence and is faced with the same situation as me. I do not know what we will do if they come for her.*

EEK's story is complicated. He is an educator. For EEK, "educator" is not a title, it is a vocation. He taught while he was in prison because his faith led him to do it. He was not compensated, he had no contract, nor did he have any obligation to teach others. A "vocation" is a call or summons and within a religious context is often interpreted as the voice of God or a Higher Power compelling one to a particular action or work. Adams defines "vocation" as "a command of God addressed to a specific person..."<sup>55</sup> I specifically asked EEK if he felt Allah<sup>56</sup> had called him to be a teacher. He said: "I never questioned what Allah has asked of me...and I never believed I should be doing anything else instead of teaching..."

The reason EEK's story is so powerful is because we should never underestimate the intrinsic value of teaching as a vocation. He touched many lives and will probably never have the opportunity to witness the long-term impact of his work. However, his motivation was simply to create the ripple in the lives of the men he taught so that someday it might make a difference in their future. EEK's willingness to continue teaching inside the prison is an

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<sup>55</sup> Robert Merrihew Adams, "Vocation," *Faith and Philosophy* 4, no. 4 (1987): 448-462.

<sup>56</sup> *Allah* is the name EEK uses for God.

example of the Hizmet sense of commitment to teaching as a vocation. When I asked him about what he thought the outcome would be for some of the prisoners he taught he was very pragmatic. He said:

*EEK: What can we do? If we don't teach them something, then what else can they do but except what they know? A man has to eat... He cannot be expected to live without eating... He cannot be expected to live without any dignity or any way to help himself... What is he supposed to do, you know? ...how is he supposed to live? Maybe if he knows something he can get a job and then he won't have to come back to this place again.*

When EEK spoke, he was very animated, and he stammered to find the words. It was clear he felt a passion for the men he had come to know at the prison. He repeated himself a number of times with an impassioned plea about how a person needs to be able to have their basic needs met which includes having the skills to be able to work for a fair wage and provide for their family.

EEK's story is one of many that have come about as a result in the rift between the Erdoğan regime and the Gülen Movement. Several *watershed moments* signaled the cataclysmic shift in the relationship and are described in greater detail in Chapter Five.

## CHAPTER 5

### WATERSHED MOMENTS

Most Americans, who were living at the time, can tell you exactly where they were and what they were doing when the planes struck the buildings on 9-11 (September 11, 2001). My grandparents talked about hearing Franklin D. Roosevelt declare December 7, 1941 “a date which will live in infamy” when Pearl Harbor was attacked by the Empire of Japan. These are historic moments we never forget. The same is true for the Hizmet people, their day of infamy is July 15, 2016; and it is a date they all know, but few like to discuss. It is the date of the alleged coup in Türkiye and, in EEK’s words, on that day all of their lives “turned inside the other way.” For one family, the Açikkollu family, July 15 had previously been an annual day of celebration; their son was born July 15, 1999; but in 2016 that special day lost its celebratory value as it became like a switch that dimmed the light in the life of the family. The father, who was an educator, was taken into custody, tortured and died thirteen days later. At 17, the son was thrust to the head of the family as they grieved the loss of their patriarch.

#### **Events Leading Up to the Pinch-Point**

The term “pinch-point” can mean a number of different things, including traffic areas where congestion occurs because too many things converge into one location. In safety language, simply put, pinch-points are situations where a person, or a body part, gets caught between two hard objects that come together resulting in damage to the person. The political aspirations of the Erdoğan regime and the ethical and moral principles of the Gülen Movement represent two very hard objects coming together with the Hizmet people caught in the pinch point. As previously mentioned the political tensions started with healthy and

rigorous debate over reform movements oriented toward the common good of Turkish society. In the 1990s the AKP introduced political reform which included a slight shift from staunch secularism to a recognition of moderate Islamic roots within the structure of the government. The Gülenists initially allied themselves conceptually with the AKP and many judicial and State level positions were filled by Hizmet people.<sup>1</sup> What evolved over the course of the next 10 to 15 years was a what Özbudun describes as a “cleavage between the secular centre and the religious conservative periphery.”<sup>2</sup> As Erdoğan and the AKP have introduced a series of legal referendums, power has been centralized with the seat of the President.<sup>3</sup> This consolidation of power and alleged abuses related to the 2013 Corruption scandal and the Academics for Peace debacle, pointed toward the July 14, 2016 event as the pinch-point that forever changed the course of history for Türkiye.

### **July 15, 2016: The Night of the Alleged Coup Attempt**

What really happened on the night of July 15, 2016, in Türkiye may never be known. The answer depends on who you ask and which source of information you believe. In the United States our legal system uses the term “preponderance of the evidence” which simply means that something has been proven to be more likely true than not.<sup>4</sup> In legal terms we systematically examine the evidence to determine which story makes more sense, especially

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<sup>1</sup> M. Hakan Yavuz, "A Framework for Understanding the Intra-Islamist Conflict Between the AK Party and the Gülen Movement," *Politics, Religion & Ideology* 19, no. 1 (2018): 11-32.

<sup>2</sup> Ergun Özbudun, "AKP at the Crossroads: Erdoğan's Majoritarian Drift," *South European Society and Politics* 19, no. 2 (2014): 155.

<sup>3</sup> Cezarina Chirica, "Turkey's Secularism after the 2016 Failed Military Coup and the State's Degülenization," *Studium-Revista Studenților, Masteranzilor Si Doctoranzilor în Istorie* 10 (2017): 107-115.

<sup>4</sup> “Burden of proof” and “preponderance of evidence,” US District Court, Vermont. [www.vtd.uscourts.gov](http://www.vtd.uscourts.gov).



when the “facts” set before us seem at odds. The perspectives of the storytellers in the July 2016 Bosphorus Bridge event are at opposite odds and it is our responsibility as neutral jurists to determine which story makes more sense.

Coup d'état mentality is nothing unusual in the Turkish narrative. The political history of Türkiye has endured three military “interventions” since the inception of the Republic; 1960, 1971 and 1980.<sup>5</sup> In 1960, the military uprising and subsequent coup was written into the history books as a “revolution” because, in simplistic terms, the political parties in power had attempted to diminish the role of the military in Turkish society.<sup>6</sup> The military is a remaining vestige of the Ottoman Empire in Turkish society and persists as the means by which modern political discourse finds its source. Therefore, in July 2016, when the news media reported that an attempted coup had occurred it was not an unlikely scenario given Turkish history and was quite believable at the outset.

On the one hand, the official story from the Turkish government was that a coup d'état had been thwarted on the night of July 15, 2016, and those responsible for the attack would be held accountable by the court system. Initial reports by Turkish Intelligence officials indicated that members of FETÖ<sup>7</sup> had plotted and organized the attacks.<sup>8</sup> On the other hand, many observers believe the coup attempt was staged as a means for the

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<sup>5</sup> Idil Gögüs and Sabine Mannitz, “‘The World Culture Entered Turkey:’ New Conflict Lines and the Challenges for Democratic Consolidation in Turkey,” (Frankfurt: Peace Research Institute 2016): 1-36.

<sup>6</sup> Kemal H. Karpat, “The Military and Politics in Turkey, 1960-64: A Socio-Cultural Analysis of a Revolution,” *The American Historical Review* 75, no. 6 (1970): 1654-1683.

<sup>7</sup> FETÖ, Fethullahçı Terör Örgütü translated from Turkish as Fethullah (Gülen) Terrorist Organization so dubbed by the Erdoğan government.

<sup>8</sup> Ibrahim Kalin, “After the Coup Attempt, Turkey's Success Story Continues,” *Insight Turkey* 18, no. 3 (2016): 11-17.

government to enact various articles within their laws to increase the power of the government to quash opposition and dissent, and to solidify the authoritarian leadership of Erdoğan. A third belief is that the events were a choreographed plan devised by the Erdoğan regime directly targeting the perceived threat of the Gülen Movement and the Hizmet people.<sup>9</sup> No matter which story is true, the events of the evening of July 15, 2016, appeared to have started with the blocking of the bridge over the Bosphorus by military troops.<sup>10</sup>

The official story of what occurred on that night is as follows:

The Bosphorus Bridge and the Fatih Sultan Mehmet Bridge linking Istanbul's Asian and European parts were blocked by the army, the activity of the two Istanbul airports was stopped, and gunfire and explosions could be heard in both Istanbul and Ankara. The TRT<sup>11</sup> public television station was besieged and occupied by the same army and a state of general chaos quickly encompassed Turkey. The Chief of the General Staff was taken hostage, as were the public television reporters who were detained by the military. The army announced the takeover of power and the imposition of the martial law, while promising a new Constitution.<sup>12</sup>

The above quote mentions the TRT, widely believed to be the voice of the AKP in Türkiye and not an independent news source. The TRT was intended to be an international source of news, however, media freedom is restricted in Türkiye and controlled by the government.<sup>13</sup> The journalists walk a fine line and must always report from the perspective

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<sup>9</sup> Ayla Gol, "Turkey's Clash of Islamists: Erdogan vs Gülen," *OpenDemocracy*, August 3, 2016, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/turkey-s-clash-of-islamists-erdogan-vs-g-len/>.

<sup>10</sup> Ateş Altınordu, "A Midsummer Night's Coup: Performance and Power in Turkey's July 15 Coup Attempt," *Qualitative Sociology* 40 (2017): 139-164.

<sup>11</sup> TRT is Turkish Radio and Television Corporation and is the national broadcaster of Turkey, <https://www.trtworld.com/about>.

<sup>12</sup> Cezarina Chirica, "Turkey's Secularism after the 2016 Failed Military Coup and the State's Degülenization," *Studium-Revista Studenților, Masteranzilor Si Doctoranzilor în Istorie* 10 (2017): 108.

<sup>13</sup> Mona Elswah and Philip N. Howard, "Where News Could Not Inspire Change: TRT World as a Party Broadcaster," *Journalism* 23, no. 10 (2022): 2079-2095.

the portrays the government in a positive light. The general details of the official story are not in dispute; there were military troops blocking the Bosphorus Bridge. How the troops got there, who gave the orders for them to be there, why students were sent on an exercise guised as military training with live ammution, and what they were told was happening are completely murky details. Figure 5.1 is a map of the three bridges that connect the European and Asian continents in Istanbul.

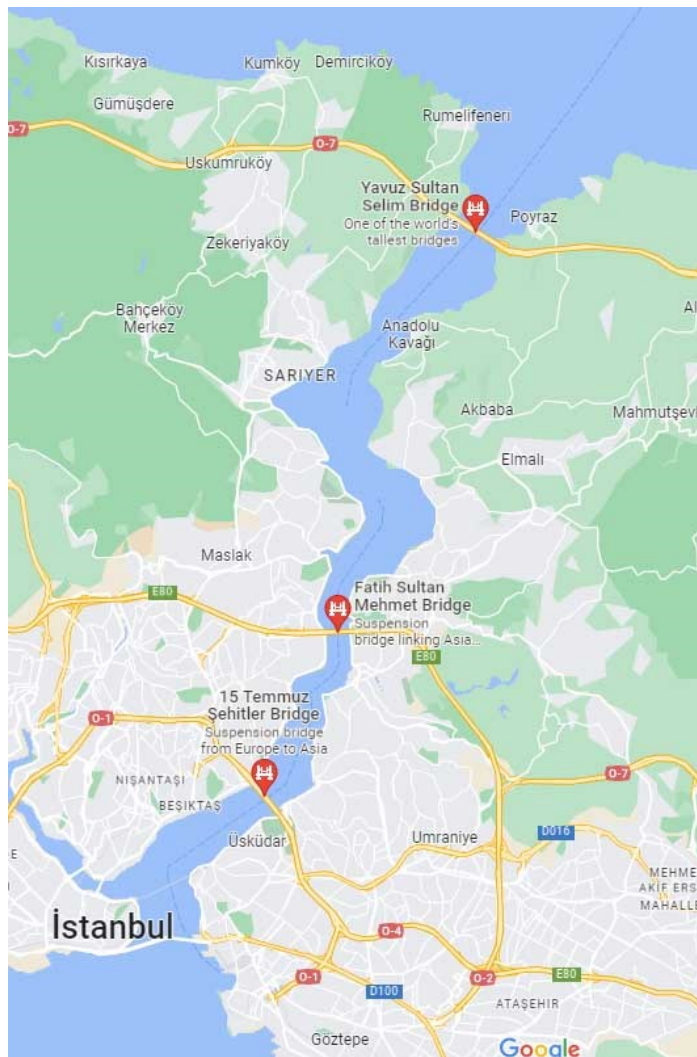


Figure 5-1: Google Map of the Bosphorus Strait with bridges indicated.

Before we start with the story, it is important to know a little about the significance of the Bosphorus Bridge<sup>14</sup> as an iconic symbol of modernity and progress in Türkiye which is, perhaps, why it was chosen as the launch point for the events that unfolded on the evening of July 15, 2016. Figure 5-1 is a map of the Bosphorus Strait and has the location of the 3 bridges indicated with red pins.<sup>15</sup> The Bosphorus Strait is a natural waterway that connects the Black Sea to the Sea of Marmara and is a very important connection for trade in the area. The Sea of Marmara empties into the Aegean Sea and eventually opens to the Mediterranean Sea which is an invaluable trade route and has been since ancient times. There are three bridges spanning the Bosphorus Strait; the Boğaziçi (Bosphorus Bridge) now known as the 15<sup>th</sup> July Martyrs' Bridge, the Fatih Sultan Mehmet Bridge, and the Yavuz Sultan Selim Bridge. These bridges connect the Asian side of Türkiye to the European continent. The bridges crossing the Bosphorus are famous Turkish landmarks and high points for tourism, especially related to Christian history surrounding Constantinople and the fall of Rome.<sup>16</sup> The highly visible Bosphorus Bridge is an ideal photo opportunity for every occasion, which makes it the perfect location to orchestrate the events of this particular evening.

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<sup>14</sup> Bosphorus and Bosporus are both legitimate English spellings of the translated word Boğaziçi which is the name of the waterway that separates the European and Asian continents in Istanbul.

<sup>15</sup> Google Map search for Bosphorus, Türkiye, <https://www.google.com/maps/place/Bosphorus/@41.1272363,29.0112212,11.25z/data=!4m6!3m5!1s0x14caca68143c999f:0x63005b61fde9dfb5!8m2!3d41.2213125!4d29.1290157!16zL20vMDFsZ2Y0?entry=ttu>.

<sup>16</sup> Cameron Deggin, "Famous Bosphorus Bridges of Istanbul," *Property Turkey Blog*, March 2023, <https://www.propertyturkey.com/blog-turkey/famous-bosphorus-bridges-of-istanbul>.

## **The Night of July 15, 2016 and the Bosphorus Bridge**

For one family, and many others, what happened on that night became the embodiments of every mother's nightmare. Imagine, for a moment, a mother sends her high-school age child to summer camp; and, unbeknownst to anyone, her child, along with the other campers, are taken overnight to a military exercise as a part of their training. This event then results in her 19 year-old son, along with the other classmates, being taken into custody by the police, detained with no contact to the outside, and eventually sentenced to life in prison. A person need not be a parent to imagine the crushing pain and agony a mother would feel as those events unfolded over the course of time. Furthermore, one should never underestimate how far a parent is willing to go for their child in these circumstances. This is the story of Melek and Furkan Çetinkaya and their experience of the Bosphorus Bridge.

My first encounter with Melek Çetinkaya was via a Zoom meeting in March 2022. She was a guest speaker at an Advocates of Silenced Turkey (AST) Advisory Board meeting of which I am a member. She spoke through an interpreter and, at the time, was in the middle of an advocacy campaign to free her son, Furkan Çetinkaya, from prison. At the time when she spoke to us, I had no awareness of the events that had occurred on the Bosphorus Bridge in July 2016, nor any realization that these events were considered to be the hallmark of the alleged staged coup attempt attributed to the Hizmet people. The woman on the screen of the Zoom meeting made an impassioned plea and the interpreter was quite challenged to keep up with all that she had to say to us on that evening. I was not really able to understand what she was saying in Turkish but her words were full of emotion that seemed to reflect anger, frustration and indignation. I recalled writing in my journal that I would later want to follow-up with her and hoped she would consent to telling her story. I also distinctly remember not

believing, at the time, her son would ever see the light of day outside of the prison gates because the case against the students seemed insurmountable.

One of the advisory board members later told me he had “done a little research” and discovered that what the students had done on that bridge was horrific as shown in Figure 5-2.<sup>17</sup> He was initially not sympathetic. I asked him where his information was sourced, and

## What was Turkey’s failed coup about – and what’s happened since?

*The events of July 15, 2016 left a huge effect on Turkey’s domestic and foreign policy – and can still be felt today.*



People protest against the attempted coup on Istanbul’s iconic Bosphorus Bridge, now officially renamed the ‘15 July Martyrs Bridge’ [File: Emrah Gurel/AP]

By Arwa Ibrahim  
15 Jul 2022



Figure 5-2: Al Jazeera photo of Bosphorus Bridge after it was retaken when alleged coup attempt was over.

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<sup>17</sup> Arwa Ibrahim, “*What Was Turkey’s Failed Coup About – And What’s Happened Since?*” Al Jazeera. July 15, 2022, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/7/15/turkeys-failed-coup-attempt-explainer>.

he said: “Google.” I warned him that it was my understanding that he should not believe everything he reads about the Hizmet people on *Google* because the information in the Turkish media released to the Internet is controlled by the government, which is who is alleged to be committing the atrocities. We both “dug a little deeper” and agreed that a preponderance of the evidence suggests the students were used as pawns on the bridge in a chess game that was far above their capacity to orchestrate.

Furkan was attending a summer camp as a part of his academic requirements in a program similar to that of ROTC in the U.S. It was a five-year program, was known as the Turkish Armed Forces Air Force Academy and its purpose was to train young cadets to become military officers upon graduation. Furkan and the other cadets were instructed to board busses and were told they were being transported to a military exercise. Court documents and statements from other cadets support his story.<sup>18</sup> Furkan says up until they arrived at the bridge, the cadets believed the exercise was a training exercise, but the commanders shouting orders at them most certainly made the threat seem real. Some of the cadets were issued weapons with live ammunition, others had knives and some had no weapons. They were set upon the Bosphorus Bridge with direct orders from their commanders to defend the position against the protesters on the other side of the line.

Figure 5-3 is one of many news media photos posted following the night of July 15, 2016 by BBC with photo credit to Reuters.<sup>19</sup> In the end, the students were made the scapegoats for unspeakable tragedy, the magnitude of which is somewhat murky. Several

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<sup>18</sup> Abdullah Ayasun, “After Six Years in Prison, Turkish Military Academy Trainees Released Pending Trial,” *Medium*, June 24, 2022, <https://abyasun.medium.com/after-six-years-in-prison-turkish-military-trainees-released-pending-trial-ca263fba8ba4>.

<sup>19</sup> “Turkey Coup Attempt: Crowds Confront Soldiers on Bosphorus Bridge,” *BBC*, July 16, 2016, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-36816605>.



One of the first signs to the outside world that there was unrest brewing in Turkey on Friday evening was when soldiers blocked off the Bosphorus Bridge, a vital part of the city's network.

Figure 5-3: Students on the Bosphorus Bridge, July 15, 2016.

news agencies reported numbers as low as 42 deaths immediately following the event with revised numbers later reported to be between 250 to 290.<sup>20</sup> For the purposes of this story, the exact numbers are somewhat irrelevant, but what seems fairly certain is that the students were positioned on the bridge, a violent clash occurred, and they were portrayed as perpetrators of terrorism instead of students following the orders of their commanders. The students who survived the night, Furkan among them, were arrested and detained following the incident. They were charged with treason and sentenced to life in prison for their crimes.

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<sup>20</sup> For early numbers: Fulya Ozerkan, Stuart Williams and Caroline Henshaw, "Chaos Reigns in Turkey as Military Attempts Coup," *The Times of Israel*, July 16, 2016, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/chaos-reigns-in-turkey-as-military-launches-coup/>. For later numbers: "Turkey Renames Bosphorus Bridge after Failed Coup Victims," *The New Arab*, July 26, 2016, <https://www.newarab.com/news/turkey-renames-bosphorus-bridge-after-failed-coup-victims>.



Melek Çetinkaya believed her son when he told her what had happened. Given the rule of a preponderance of evidence; her son's story makes more sense than that of the prosecution, and is believable. Simply put: How is it plausible that a group of students away at summer camp could arrange to charter busses, sneak away as a large group from a military installation undetected, coordinate with other factions of the military to rendezvous at the bridge, arm themselves and attack unarmed who civilians who randomly appeared at the base of the bridge on a particular night? Someone with authority in the military, other than the students, had to have organized, planned and carried out this exercise.

Melek Çetinkaya did not stand by idle and helpless as the parent of a son unjustly imprisoned. Figure 5-4 is a news headline from one of the times she was arrested as she advocated for her son and the other students' freedom. She took to the streets and social media, at great risk to her own personal safety, to free her son and the other students facing the same prison terms. She became an advocate and voice that was so strong and powerful it could not be ignored... and it was not ignored. She was arrested and charged with "disseminating terrorist propaganda" in July 2020.<sup>21</sup> However, that was only one of the times she was arrested; she was arrested more than 30 times as she worked tirelessly for the release of her son and the other students. June 21, 2022, Furkan Çetinkaya and 65 other Air Force Academy trainees were ordered released by the Turkish Supreme Court of Appeals.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> "Human Rights Activist and Mother of Jailed Cadet Arrested for Terrorist Propaganda," Stockholm Center for Freedom, March 29, 2020, <https://stockholmcf.org/human-rights-activist-and-mother-of-jailed-cadet-arrested-for-terrorist-propaganda/>.

<sup>22</sup> Abdullah Ayasun, "After Six Years in Prison, Turkish Military Academy Trainees Released Pending Trial," *Medium*, June 24, 2022, <https://abyasun.medium.com/after-six-years-in-prison-turkish-military-trainees-released-pending-trial-ca263fba8ba4>.

## ARREST OF MS. MELEK CETINKAYA IS AN INTERVENTION TO DEMOCRACY!

YUSUF METİN July 17, 2020



Figure 5-4: Melek Çetinkaya was arrested more than 30 times protesting and advocating on behalf of her son and the other students on the Bosphorus Bridge.

Melek was able to celebrate with her son, Furkan, even though it took many years and tremendous effort to secure his release from prison. Figure 5-5 is a Twitter post made by Melek on the day of Furkan's release from the prison. As of 2023, Melek and Furkan have fled Türkiye and are considered fugitives of the State (Türkiye). They are currently living as refugees in a country of safe harbor while continuing to advocate for other unjustly imprisoned students who remain in Turkish prisons. Others on the Bosphorus Bridge, however, were not so lucky, as was the case of Ragip Enes Katran.



Translation: I will continue to fight until I get all of the children inside (the home where they belong).

Figure 5-5: Melek and Furkan reunited after his release. June 2021.

### **Ragip Enes Katran**

This is the story of Ragip Enes Katran as told by his family.

Ragip Enes was born in 1996 in Gaziantep. He finished middle school and high school in first place. He qualified to enter the Air Force Academy which was his dream since boyhood. He wanted to continue his successful education life there and become a pilot. Ragip Enes, third year air force academy student, went to Yalova for summer gliding training, on July 12, 2016. After assembly at 22.30 on the night of July 15, he went to his ward to sleep. Their commanders sent them off to Istanbul with emergency sirens with the order of "There is a drill, be ready." Students who came to the Bosphorus Bridge in Istanbul at 02:00 in the morning were met with the

angry crowd who opposed the planned coup. The crowd first set fire to the bus that included Ragıp and broke its windows, then Ragıp Enes was killed by cutting his throat with a sharp object, by an unidentified person. The families were allowed to go to the Forensic Medicine Institute 11 days after the attempted coup to identify the bodies of their children. Ragıp Enes, who was slandered and branded a traitor by the so-called 'coup plotter', was not even given a hearse, the family carried his own body and buried it.<sup>23</sup>

I did not have the chance to speak with the Katran family, but the story of his death resonates with the news reports of what occurred on the Bosphorus Bridge that evening. The family sent items for display in the Un-Muted exhibit and when I read the placard with the story they sent, it sounded very much like what Furkan had said happened on that ill-fated night.

Figure 5-6 is a photo of the Un-Muted exhibit artifacts sent to AST by Ragıp's family. I asked Aslihan from AST if she could tell me what the handwritten note in his exhibit artifacts said and she sent the following translation:

*To give our lives for the sake of independence feels sweeter than drinking ice-cold water in the August heat.*

*May the souls of all our martyrs who rushed to death without a moment's hesitation rest in peace.*

Aslihan said that revisiting the words was very emotional for her because he was so young to have died before he had a chance to live. It made her think about her own daughter and son and how they could so easily have been caught up in the violence.

The events that occurred on the Bosphorus Bridge signaled the start of what the government-controlled media describes as a “crackdown on corruption,” and what others

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<sup>23</sup> Ragıp Enes Katran's story and artifacts were given to Aslihan at AST by his family. Un-Muted Exhibit booklet text translated to English, June 2022, 10.



Figure 5-6: Exhibit display of Ragip Enes Katran artifacts and story provided to AST by his family.

describe as a systematic quest by the Erdoğan regime to eliminate the Hizmet people from existence. Again, what we know for certain is that the lives of individuals and families have been forever inalterably changed. The loss of life and damage is too great to repair and the numbers of people impacted are substantial. By all estimates, both conservative and liberal, thousands of people have felt the effect of the Bosphorus Bridge ripple.

## **Mina Leyla: A Journalist Who Un-Silences the Voices of a Genocide**

Mina Leyla was a journalist, screen-writer and popular media presence in Türkiye prior to the events of July 2016. I had the occasion to meet her in person in June 2022, and I was in awe of her poise and presence. When she walked into the room, I felt the sense that someone important had entered, and I was struck by a beauty that exuded through an air of peaceful calm within her. I had read several of her books and felt as though she had a way with words that made the story she was telling come to life. She has written a number of books that have been translated from Turkish to English; and my favorites are *Silent Scream*, *Broken Lives* and *Baby in the Bag*.

I later had the opportunity to interview Mina Leyla for this research. Although she is not an educator, per se, she believes it is her duty as a journalist to inform on the issues and thus she becomes a de facto educator by using her depth of knowledge and skills to become a voice for the those who are no longer able to speak. As previously mentioned, Mina Leyla is a nom de plume which is necessary because her work is an affront to the Erdoğan regime. She believes, if the Turkish government knew who her true identity then they would most certainly harass and possibly imprison her family who remain in Türkiye. She is part of an advocacy group in the United States that seeks to un-silence the voices of the social genocide of the Hizmet people, Advocates of Silenced Turkey (AST).

In the forward to *Silent Scream*, Sueda Polat described Leyla as follows: “In the battle of the oppressor and the oppressed, she (Leyla) took sides with the oppressed.”<sup>24</sup> In the book, Leyla interviewed a man who fled Türkiye and is living as an asylee in the United States. She asked him if had regrets or blamed the Gülen Movement for all that had happened

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<sup>24</sup> Mina Leyla, *Silent Scream: True Stories of Oppression in Turkey*, ed./trans. Sueda Polat (AST Publishing, 2021), 3.

to him. What she wrote as his response typifies the comments made to me by the participants in this research as I interviewed them.

I have never blamed the Hizmet movement for any persecution, hardship, or trial I have experienced. I am sure of my innocence, and I am sure of the innocence of Fethullah Gülen and my brothers and sisters who have been slandered as terrorists. I have never witnessed Fethullah Gülen saying anything which could incite any form of terrorism. Hizmet is my way of life, and I don't regret anything I have ever done on this way.<sup>25</sup>

When I spoke with Mina I asked her how she was able to keep writing story after story, all with such tragic ends. She said “It is the only way we can find hope... if they die and no one ever tells their story, then what did their life mean? ...and if just one story helps someone have hope or feel better about their situation... even if it simply tells the family that someone is listening and someone cares, then it is worth every bit of effort... and really it is not me who is suffering, I was able to get out and continue to live my life...”

### **The First Martyr of the Hizmet Genocide: Gökhan Açıkkollu**

Mina Leyla had the opportunity to interview the family of Gökhan Açıkkollu in 2022 and she published their story in a book entitled *The Life and Legacy of Gökhan Açıkkollu: A Teacher Tortured to Death*.<sup>26</sup> In the Preface to the book, Mina describes watching the video of Gökhan's death which was captured on CCTV. She wrote:

“Oh no! I wish his family won't see this!” Later on, when I was interviewing his wife Tulay, I learned that it was indeed her (she) who had given that video footage to

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid. 55.

<sup>26</sup> Mina Leyla is the nom de plume of a woman who at one time was a highly regarded and well-known journalist and media presence in Türkiye before the alleged coup. She is in exile in the United States and has continued her work publishing numerous books and articles through Advocates of Silenced Turkey (AST). Mina writes in her native tongue of Turkish; this book was translated to English by Hafza Girdap, the Executive Director of AST. Mina Leyla, *The Life and Legacy of Gökhan Açıkkollu: A Teacher Tortured to Death*, ed./trans. Hafza Girdap (AST Publishing, 2022).

*BOLD Media* to be published. She had taken that footage from her husband’s court file, but for a long time she didn’t dare to watch it.<sup>27</sup>

Gökhan Açikkollu was a high school history teacher and is the first recorded martyr of the Hizmet genocide in Türkiye. He, and others, were detained one week after the alleged coup attempt on July 15, 2016, and within 13 days the torture he endured at the hands of the police and soldiers resulted in his death. Much of the details were captured on CCTV in the prison and documented in a court file. Gökhan Açikkollu was never charged with an actual crime, and 18 months after his death the Turkish government reinstated him to his position as a history teacher. These “facts” or details concerning the torture and death of the educator were confirmed in a report issued by the Stockholm Center for Freedom in November 2017.<sup>28</sup> Figure 5-7 is a picture of the crowded cell where Gökhan took his last breath.<sup>29</sup> Sadly, those who were the source of the torture and ill-treatment were never charged and never punished for their role in the death of the teacher. When it was announced that no charges would be brought against the perpetrators, Mumine Tulay Açikkollu, Gökhan’s wife, lodged a complaint and requested an investigation by the United Nations (UN).<sup>30</sup> The UN found that the State (Government of Türkiye) had, indeed, failed to protect the life of the prisoner, had

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid. p. 9

<sup>28</sup> *Tortured to Death: Holding Gökhan Açikkollu’s Killers to Account*, Stockholm Center for Freedom, 2017, 2-61. According to their website, <https://stockholmcf.org/>, The Stockholm Center for Freedom is a non-profit organization setup by a group of journalist from Türkiye in exile in Sweden in response to the crackdown on press freedom by the Erdoğan government.

<sup>29</sup> Photo thumbnail of video, *Independent Türkçe*, <https://www.indyturk.com/tags/g%C3%B6khan-a%C3%A7ikkollu>. WARNING! The link connects to a video of his death.

<sup>30</sup> Gökhan Günes, “United Nations Committee on Human Rights Decision about Gökhan Açikkollu,” JusticeSquare, <https://www.justicesquare.com/english/united-nations-committee-on-human-rights-decision-about-gokhan-acikollu/>.





Figure 5-7: Gökhan Açikkollu's in his prison cell as he lay dying.

failed to investigate the death properly, and had failed to meet the criteria of “reasonableness and necessity” for detaining him. Unfortunately, the UN also found that Tulay had not fully exhausted all remedies within Türkiye’s legal system before submitting the complaint to the UN. It seems unlikely that anyone will be held accountable for the death of Gökhan, but thanks to the effort of Leyla Mina his story will not be forgotten.

### **Women Educators Imprisoned**

Ha was a history teacher at a university in Türkiye. She was among the first group of women to be detained for an extended period in Turkish prison. She served a five-and-a-half year sentence, survived tremendous trauma, and has since been released. I came to know her through common friends. The only thing I know about her time in the prison is that she, and the other women she was with, survived in very meager, difficult, and challenging conditions. While she was in the prison, she taught herself how to make things out of the

trash. She took things she found and made something beautiful so that she and the other women would have something to hold onto and not lose hope. Figure 5-8 is a description in her words describing her interest in jewelry making.

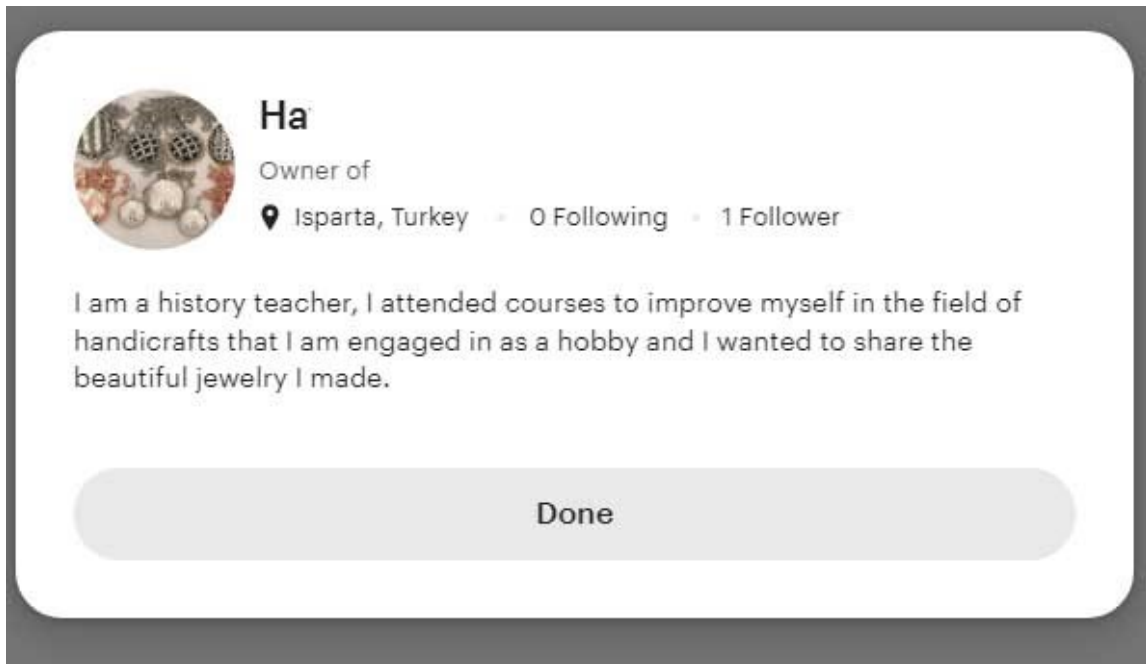


Figure 5-8: Description from the “About” link on Ha’s website.

Since her release, she has been unable to find a job teaching because her name remains on a list and her teaching credentials have been stripped from her. She now makes jewelry and sells the items online. I came to know her story because my partner and I were each gifted a bracelet and necklace by our friend whose mother served time in the prison with Ha. Figure 5-9 is a picture of the precious gifts we received. My partner said that when she holds the jewelry in her hand she has “mixed” feelings. One feeling is awe at the intricacy, uniqueness and beauty of the item. The other feeling is a deep sadness for the reason why we have it. My partner said: “It would be so much better for everyone if Ha was still teaching at the university and none of this had ever happened... maybe in her free time she really would have taken up jewelry making as a hobby instead of a means of survival...”



Figure 5-9: Photo of jewelry made by Ha.

The stories of Melek and Furkan Çetinkaya, Ragip Enes Katran, Gökhan Açikkollu, and Ha reveal how educators and students found themselves ensnared in the early moments of an enduring political trap wherein some survived and some did not. Students away at summer camp suddenly found themselves branded as traitors and facing life sentences, and educators tortured and imprisoned. In the following chapter “the show must go on...” Somehow, somehow, students and educators, individuals and families, must find the strength to do more than merely survive the genocide. Their stories shed light into the lived experience of resilience in the diaspora.

## CHAPTER 6

### HIZMET EDUCATORS AND STUDENTS LIVING AND WORKING IN EXILE

“There’s no place like home... There’s no place like home... There’s no place like home...” said by Dorothy after she defeated the evil witch in the Wizard of Oz.<sup>1</sup> “Everyone” knows if Dorothy clicks the heels of her ruby slippers and says the phrase three times, she will return home. First, I acknowledge the word “everyone” may be a bit presumptive, but I happen to be from Kansas and the classic movie was an annual tradition in our house. In fact, when I was old enough to ride a bicycle around town with my friends, I remember one of the neighbor ladies used to say to several of us “...you’ all better click your little heels and get on back home before it gets dark... now get on...” The sense of belonging to a neighborhood and having an anchor location known as “home-base” was the very definition of comfort and security when I was growing up. And yes, I am acutely aware many families, for many reasons, do not have what I would define as the luxury of a home-base. In this chapter, I will explore the stories of students and educators who have had the comfort and security of home-base ripped away from them; who live in exile not of their choosing, but of their liking; and for whom, no matter how many times they click their heels and say the magic phrase, will never wake up in their former home-base.

#### **Inspired Research**

“Please turn your camera back on, please! I just want to see the Turkish sky one more time...” This impassioned plea came from a young man named Ali. We were in a Zoom meeting and one of the participants accidentally turned his camera on while he was walking

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<sup>1</sup> L. Frank Baum, *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (Chicago, New York: G.M. Hill Co., 1900).

through a bazaar in Izmir.<sup>2</sup> We all briefly saw a shaky view of a crowded market place and then the camera turned upward and all we could see was the blue sky with a few puffy, wispy clouds. The participant quickly turned off the camera and that is when Ali un-muted his microphone and made the request. Later when I interviewed Ali, I asked him “How is the sky in Türkiye any different than the sky where you are now?” He said: “I don’t know, it just is.” Ali and I shared cups of tea during our interviews; he in Germany and me in Kansas City. He said that having the tea together made him feel like we were connected even though we were many miles apart and this was something that was very important to him. Figure 6-1 is a picture sent by Ali of his tea.

The inspiration for this research began with a conversation with an asylee in Germany. A young man named Ali. I could hardly believe his story and how it related to so many other stories I had heard regarding a genocide that was occurring among the Turkish people. I found it difficult to believe this was happening among such a well-educated group in a seemingly modern country. Ali’s story convinced me it was worth further investigation and I am grateful he opened my eyes and was willing to share himself so deeply. The social genocide of the Hizmet people extends beyond the scope of educators and includes people of all ages and occupations, including students; Ali is one such person.

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<sup>2</sup> When we meet as a group on Zoom, I am the only person with the camera turned on. The reason for this is security. Each person in the meeting is at risk of being discovered by MIT (Turkish Intelligence) and fears repercussions to either themselves or their families who remain in Türkiye. This group is an English Language Learner discussion group that meets twice weekly. This is where I first met most of the people who agreed to participate in this research project. It was originally organized by a man named Mehmet who is a Turkish refugee, a member of Dialogue Institute of Kansas City, and a personal friend.



Figure 6-1: Tea with Ali.

### **Ali's Story<sup>3</sup>**

Ali was an idealistic university student in his 20's in the process of preparing a master's thesis at Istanbul Technical University when he was arrested in 2017. He describes this day as the moment everything in his "life was turned up-ended (upside-down)." He was

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<sup>3</sup> Ali requested that I not disclose his surname because, in his words, "Turkey is not a safe place for Hizmet people and also their relatives." Ali has family living in Türkiye and is concerned his story might put them in jeopardy.

detained and sent to prison in Türkiye because he was Hizmet.<sup>4</sup> When asked, Ali's mother describes her son as a "iyi çocuk" (good boy, in Turkish) who "ailesi için her zaman hayırlı bir evlat olmuştur" (has always been a good son to his family, in Turkish); the Erdoğan regime, however, alleged otherwise. By virtue of his association with the Hizmet movement, Ali suddenly found himself branded a terrorist and imprisoned with murderers, rapists and thieves.<sup>5</sup> When the soldiers arrested Ali and put him in the detention cell, he recalls saying to himself "I thought only bad people went to prison; I am not a bad person... why is this happening?"

Ali recalls, the first three months of detention were the worst time of his life. He described his torment as "psychological difficulty adapting to the new life." What he eventually discovered, within the confines of the prison walls, was a brotherhood of support. He said, "we needed each other in order to survive... I am blessed by Allah to have survived..." He confessed he was very depressed and felt hopeless at first, but very quickly recognized his survival was dependent on the support he felt from the Hizmet men he shared the cell with. He said, "we were all living the same problem... and dealing with the same situation..." He described the cell as very crowded without enough beds for everyone and not

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<sup>4</sup> The Hizmet people are Sunni Muslims who follow the teachings of Fethullah Gülen. "Who Is Fethullah Gülen, the Man Erdogan Blames for the Coup Attempt in Turkey?" *CBC*. July 21, 2016. (Accessed December 9, 2019, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/world/fethullah-gulen-profile-1.3686974>.)

<sup>5</sup> The Hizmet people, branded as "terrorists," have been the subject of persecution and imprisonment since 2016 in Türkiye. Ali is Hizmet, and his only crime was his association with the Hizmet movement. Until the prosecutor identified witnesses, the only evidence against him was a bank account with Bankasya. The prosecutors investigated his account and found no evidence against him, and then, after he was released, the prosecutors said they had additional witnesses who would testify against him. He believes the witnesses' testimonies were coerced in exchange for their own freedom.

even enough room on the floor to sleep. Day and night the prison was never quiet and offered limited access to food and water with poor accommodations for hygiene. The toilet was on the side of the cell in plain view with no privacy. The humiliation was something each of the men had to endure.

After ten months, Ali was released from prison and went to meet with his university advisor to resume his Master's program. He had hoped he would be able to "pick up the pieces" and get on with his life. When he went to meet with his advisor at the university, he was told by the professor he would no longer be permitted to continue in the program. The professor expressed his refusal to associate with a student perceived to be a supporter of the forbidden Hizmet movement. The professor also conveyed his contempt for Hizmet people, and implied Ali was undeserving of continuing his education at the university because he was a traitor to his country. Ali was perplexed and confused by what was said to him. So many things had happened that simply did not make sense to him. Ali believes fear of reprisal was likely the motivating factor for the professor's response to Ali. The events that had previously occurred with other university professors in the government's swift and severe response to the Academics for Peace Petition incident made it clear that no one was safe from reprisal. Simply put, the professor could not risk his own imprisonment by allowing an alleged Hizmet affiliate to continue academic pursuits under his supervision.

When Ali was released from prison after ten months of detention, he originally believed his life would return to a sense of normal as he awaited the trial that would exonerate him. In Ali's life, nothing was farther from the truth. He had been tried three times during his detention, and at each trial he successfully denied the accusations against him. After his release, he faced a series of additional court appearances. Finally, when he received



word of an eighth trial, his attorney informed him he would most likely be convicted and returned to prison because the prosecutors had two witnesses that would testify against him. His attorney confirmed, through unofficial channels, the witnesses were prepared to testify that Ali was Hizmet and would do so on exchange for their own freedom. When Ali received this news, he knew he had to flee the country and seek refuge in a place of safety. He quickly gathered a little bit of money and a lot of courage, loaded a few essential items into a backpack, made arrangements with a smuggler to cross the Meriç river into Greece and sought refuge in Germany.<sup>6</sup>

Three and a half years later (2023), Ali is living as a refugee in Germany and has been made aware of at least four to six witnesses prosecutors have prepared to testify against him if he were he to be extradited to Türkiye. From the position of the prosecutors in Türkiye, Ali is a fugitive; from the viewpoint of the United Nations, Ali is a refugee; from the eyes of his mother, Ali is a son separated from his family.

When Ali shared his story, he said he felt it was very important for him to have this opportunity to have his voice be heard. This experience had taken everything away from him and he felt like no one was listening to him and others like him. He described the interview experience as very unusual to him because he felt that even the people very close to him did not want to understand what had happened to him. He became emotional and occasionally struggled to find the English words to express how important he felt this process was to his

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<sup>6</sup> Maritsa or Maritza, also known as Meriç and Evros, is a river that runs through the Balkans in Southeast Europe. It is a common pathway out of Türkiye into Greece for refugees and asylum seekers. For most refugees, Greece is a temporary stopping point while they await relocation to other countries of safe haven.

healing. The following is Ali's account of the events that unfolded which completely disrupted his life and changed his course forever.

*I was at home when the police came to our door in the early morning hours, around five in the morning. They arrested me and took me to the jail. My mother and father looked on in disbelief and I could feel the fear coming from them for my safety... I was charged as a terrorist because they said I was belonging to Hizmet... I could not understand why this was happening because I had never done anything wrong to have a problem with the police... after a few days I was sent to the prison...when I went there, I remember my thought that only bad people went to the prisons... when I went to the cell, I discovered that the other men were just like me. They were Hizmet, too! I am thankful to Allah for putting me with them because then it was not so hard to survive. I was there for ten months and then released. After I was home, I went to see my advisor so that I could continue in my master's program and his response was shocking to me ...I didn't understand what he was saying, you know, I thought my work was very good, but he said he would no longer advise me because he knew who I was... I really just could not understand what he was saying... but now I understand, he wouldn't continue me in the program because anyone who helped a Hizmet could be arrested. I was devastated.*

*After some time, you know I was waiting for my trial, then the attorney told us, he said I would be convicted because it is true, I am Hizmet, even when I did nothing wrong. I have never harmed anyone. My family and friends helped me sort it out and I came to Germany... it was the first time I had ever been abroad from my country. You know it was not easy... there was a small group of us and we paid the smuggler,*

*and they took us to the river... we walked for hours through the mud in the darkness of night... then when we came to the shore, there was a little rubber boat and there were 13 of us squeezed in...the boat was not made to hold that many people but Mashallah (by God's will) we made it to the other side to Greece. When we arrived, we expected there would be soldiers there to arrest us, but instead there was nothing. You know, I was shocked. I was expecting to be treated harshly, my heart was beating very fast and hard. So, we just, you know, we walked for hours to get to the station to turn ourselves in. I felt very sorry for the children, they were almost too tired to even cry and the parents were like shadows taking the steps.*

*All the time, we are living these situations but, you know, sometimes it so hard to express our feelings, but I think maybe I can say something... I don't know how I can say it, but I try my best. Sometimes even my relatives don't get you (understand my situation), you know, they don't understand what is happening and they have biased thoughts... they are not bad people but they believe things they hear and then they think worse things about me. I am very worried I may never see my parents again, but who knows things can always change...Insha'allah (God willing).*

Ali now lives as a refugee in Germany. He is working in coding as a software developer and participates in the Writer's Collaborative Virtual English Language Learner course on Saturday and Sunday (morning in the United States, afternoons in Germany). Ali has expressed his feelings of appreciation for how important it is for him to participate in this group. He learned English when he was an undergraduate and speaks very little German. A requirement of his refugee status in Germany is that he must learn the German language within three years of his resettlement. His long-term plan is to seek employment in the

United States doing coding work (computer programming); and when he receives his passport in Germany, which takes a minimum of five years, he plans to visit the United States.

In retrospect, Ali's story is not atypical, he is but one of many pawns in a political chess game that has left hundreds of thousands of lives disrupted, many of whom are students. The social genocide of the Hizmet people is the Erdoğan regime's response to a perceived political threat. President Erdoğan's rise to power in the 1990s was, in part, facilitated by the Gülen Movement within Türkiye. Then, as if a switch had been flipped, the Gülen Movement become an enemy of the State, likely because the political aspirations of the Erdoğan regime were confronted by demands for justice from the Hizmet people. The quest for unchallenged political power is woven into the fabric of Turkey's history which began with the rise and fall of the Ottoman Empire, long before Turkey was established as a nation. Genocide has been a tool employed by the ruling powers of both the Ottomans and the Turks throughout their history. This genocide of the Hizmet people is no different than those of the past; those with political power were threatened by the challenges the Hizmet people presented, and their solution to the problem was to eradicate and silence dissenting voices.

### **Coming to America**

The stories told by asylee and refugee immigrants as they endeavor to acclimate and assimilate into a foreign destination culture such as the United States (U.S.) is riddled with conflicting emotions. On the one hand, they are eternally grateful to have been granted entry to a safe destination location, while on the other hand they resent all that has been lost in their former lives. All of the people who shared their stories in this research expressed a form

of grief related to missing their former life while adapting to their new life.<sup>7</sup> The grief experience comes in the emotions associated with looking both backward and forward; all the while knowing, what once was will never be again. The Hizmet people who have fled Türkiye are a part of a diaspora now living in a number of host countries, including the U.S. These individuals face indefinite imprisonment if they were to return to their home country, and any individuals associating with them are also at risk of arrest and detainment.

### **Refugees and Asylees**

The process of coming to the United States is not the easiest of tasks for immigrants. Refugees and asylum seekers are individuals and families who have been displaced across borders from their homeland due to persecution, conflicts, human rights issues and other gravely dangerous situations (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, 2022). The first step for the Hizmet asylum seeker in Türkiye is to avoid detection by those who seek to do them harm, which in this case is the government, and then to successfully flee to a country of safe harbor; neither of which is an easy task.

Refugees and Asylum seekers must have “well-founded fears” of danger involving persecution and will likely not be able to return to their homes in the foreseeable future; therefore, they must adapt to the cultural norms of their new homeland very quickly.<sup>8</sup> To be labeled as refugee status, U.S. law requires that an applicant satisfy the definition of refugee under the Immigration and Nationality Act (Immigration and Nationality Act, 1952). The qualified candidate is “any person who is outside any country of such person’s nationality...

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<sup>7</sup> Ting-Yin Lee, "The Loss and Grief in Immigration: Pastoral Care for Immigrants," *Pastoral Psychology* 59, no. 2 (2010): 159-169.

<sup>8</sup> Nina Thomas, “Immigration: The ‘Illegal Alien’ Problem,” *International Journal of Group Psychotherapy*, 70, no. 2, 270-292.

because of persecution or a well-founded fear of persecution on account of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion” (Immigration and Nationality Act, 2022, Title 8 USC 1101(42)).

The immigration system is cold and flat. The definition is absolute and clear, yet it must be applied to human lives all of whom have heart beats, feelings and emotions. How does one know when fear of anything is “well-founded?” Must I be persecuted to fear it? When is enough, enough? So many questions arise when the legal system collides with human emotions that involve fear. What seems to be true, again back to a preponderance of evidence argument, is that conditions in the place a person considers home-base become untenable and the fear of possible outcomes outweighs the benefit of staying home. These circumstances then motivate the person to leave everything behind and seek a new home-base in a land of safe harbor. Often people have to leave home-base in the dark of night with just what they are able to carry. The journey is frequently very dangerous and overwhelming, and the smugglers are not always charming and honest people. The following excerpts from *Baby in the Bag* describe the situation well:

We had previously contacted the smugglers and had found some people who would help us escape... the weather was cloudy, the sea was crashing with waves, and the rocky cliffs seemed to gloom over us, suffocating us even more so... Time stood still... Each of us were allowed to take only one backpack so that it would look like we were tourists,, the guides gave us direction with stone cold, serious expressions... we were just about to head out when one of the smugglers dropped an unexpected bomb on us: that we had to hide the baby! He gave us a travel bag and told us to put the baby in it... the smuggler said “you have no other choice...” What if he cried? What if he couldn’t breathe? ...<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Mina Leyla, *The Baby in the Bag*, ed./trans. by Hafza Girdap, Blue Dome Press AHP and Advocates of Silenced Turkey, 2020: 35-36.

The mother medicated the two-month old baby with infant allergy medicine so that he would sleep and not cry during the journey; and, with great trepidation, the mother put the baby in the bag, and the father carried the package across the border. To everyone's relief, no harm was done to the child and the adults made it safely across the border. The family is now living as refugees in a new homeland always under the cloud of knowing they can never return to the home they once knew and loved so much. The mother in this story was a doctor, a graduate of a prestigious medical school in Türkiye, and a Ph.D. student at the time of her arrest. Her husband, the father of the baby in the bag, was also a doctor in Türkiye.

There are a number of different pathways for a Hizmet person to avoid detention in a Turkish prison; virtually all of them involve exiting the country or moving away from the reach of MIT, Turkish Intelligence. For some the plan involves the use of smugglers to cross borders which can include passage through turbulent waterways and hostile border patrols. For others the plan can be as simple as obtaining visas to safe harbor countries for work. None of the plans are easy or inexpensive, and the costs involve more than money. At the risk of sounding redundant, it is worth repeating, each individual or family that makes the decision to relocate leaves something behind and can likely never return. Yet, interestingly, optimism fills their stories such as with Earl and Sue

### **Earl and Sue<sup>10</sup>**

Earl and Sue are teachers. They were teaching abroad in Southeast Asia in 2016 and moved to the United States when they were hired by a charter school in the mid-west to teach middle school. Earl and Sue are a young couple who were married in 2016 under the most

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<sup>10</sup> Earl and Sue asked that I not use their real names because they both have families living in Türkiye and do not want to place their families at further risk of harm.

challenging of conditions. They met in a most interesting way and confess they would have a very funny story to tell were it not for a series of tragic events resulting in tremendous hardship for both themselves and their families. The path of events that led them to the United States was quite the rocky adventure, but they have currently settled in a mid-western community and are teaching middle school in an underserved area. For Earl and Sue, teaching is their life's passion. When I asked "why do you teach?" Sue responded "What else would I do, this is what Allah intended for me..."

Earl and Sue have distinctive personalities and are from very different backgrounds. Earl is rather quiet and could easily be described as "laid back" or unassuming in his demeanor. He seems to be always listening and, when he speaks, he usually says things that are on point and insightful. Earl is both confident and competent in his abilities and, when he is amongst friends, wears his heart on his sleeve. He is the oldest of four children in his family from Antep in south-central Türkiye and was raised in a traditional Sunni Turkish-Muslim family.<sup>11</sup> He graduated in 2013 from Ankara University in Ankara, Türkiye with a teaching degree; and, after graduation, went to Myanmar to teach computer science at the Horizon International School. He currently teaches computer science and computer applications at a middle school in the Midwest (of the United States).

In February 2023, Antep was heavily damaged by a series of earthquakes with greater than seven on the Richter magnitude scale. His family's home received minor damage but his parents reported to him the devastation in the region is extensive and will take many years to recover. Earl said in his interview that his hometown was similar in some ways to the

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<sup>11</sup> Antep is the common name for the city Gaziantep which is located in south-central Turkey which is approximately 240 kilometers or 150 miles, "as the crow flies, from the Syrian border." (Earl's words describing the distance to the border).



midwestern town where he now lives, but he very much misses the history and culture that was very much a part of his upbringing. Antep is known for its rich history that includes the influence of Armenian culture from its pre-Ottoman domination.

Sue is from Izmir, which is the third largest city in Türkiye, and is known to be the most “westernized Turkish city.” Based on archeological data, the city is well over 3000 years old, was originally Greek, perhaps controlled by the Trojans, later dominated by the Roman Empire, and eventually became a part of the Ottoman Empire.<sup>12</sup> Izmir is ideally located on the Aegean Sea and has a rich and extensive history as an important trade link to the west (European west). When Sue describes her hometown, I imagine it as being quite similar to Los Angeles, California – fast-paced, urban, diverse, coastal – essentially, where the “cool people” live. She describes her pre-2016 family as very happy and successful with everyone living a very fast-paced urban life. Sue is the oldest of three children and has one brother and one sister. Her father was a successful businessman and her mother “ran a tight ship” in managing the household. Sue’s mother raised her daughters to be proper, confident and accomplished young women. Sue and her sister often went shopping with their mother and enjoyed fashion and style. Sue’s father ensured his children were well educated and prepared to be independent and successful adults.

Sue is the oldest of three children and was raised in a Muslim Hizmet family, she knew no other way. She describes her family as very close-knit and connected to extended family. So much so, in fact, her father and his brother worked together in business and the families lived together with the grandparents in an apartment arrangement within the same

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<sup>12</sup> General information about the region taken from a Turkish visitors website, <https://www.allaboutturkey.com/izmir.html>

building. Her brother, sister and cousins were inseparable as were the aunts, uncles and grandparents.

Sue studied abroad and graduated with her teaching degree from a university in Azerbaijan. The official language of Azerbaijan is Azerbaijani, commonly referred to as Azeri, which is a Turkic language. Azerbaijan was at one time a part of the former Soviet Union, therefore, in addition to Azeri, Russian is also spoken and taught in the schools. Sue spent a year in Azerbaijan acclimating to the language before starting her university studies and is fluent in Azeri.

In 2016, Sue was teaching in Laos in an English Language International school and had been a teacher in Southeast Asia for over 8 years. She taught math and was a vice principal in charge of the discipline program at the school – to say the least, there was no wool to be pulled over her eyes when it came to the many interesting situations arising with students at the school. When she talks about discipline issues with students she says that students are the same all around the world; their behaviors are somewhat predictable because, as she put it, “kids will be kids.” There were very few surprises in her life, and she was content to be single and independent.

In 2016, Sue was a single, independent, and strong-willed woman teaching abroad at an English Language International school in South-east Asia; she had been living away from home for most of her adult life. Her parents were uncomfortable with her lack of a husband and were concerned she was soon to be a little older than they had hoped for to be a bride. They were experiencing the classic parental concern for their daughter related to the ideal age for marriage. Her father knew the Director of the school where Sue was teaching and mentioned his concerns to his friend – “...isn’t there someone who would be a good match

for my daughter?” Unbeknownst to Sue, the Director arranged for Earl to come for a visit. The Director had known Earl from his experiences in Myanmar and thought he was an ideal, eligible bachelor and a potential good match for Sue. Sue was of the impression that Earl was coming to interview for a teaching position, so when the day came for his visit she told the Director she would skip the meeting and defer to his judgement with regard to Earl’s teaching skills. Sue said the Director responded with something like “...oh no, ma’am, you will meet with him... he has paid \$1,000 for his ticket to come from Myanmar and he cannot get a refund at this late date...” Sue was unaware her father had contrived with the Director for this meeting. Sue met with Earl out of obedience to the Director and only then did she become aware of what was happening. Earl was unaware that she did not know he was there to meet her and their first encounter was a little awkward. When Sue told this story, Earl’s face flushed pink, he smiled and shook his head. I asked him what he thought of her when he met her. He said at first, he was a little bit afraid of what she might think especially since she didn’t know the details of why he was there, but at the same time he just felt like she was the one for him. Sue, on the other hand, was conflicted. She wasn’t prepared for this change in the direction of her life, especially in the context of her independent nature. She said “why did I need a man? I have everything I need and can do for myself...” Although their first encounter was a little awkward, it perfectly reflects the personalities of the couple.

After getting to know each other better, the couple decided to return to Türkiye to wed in the summer of 2016 during their school holiday period. When their families met, as is the custom in Islamic Turkish families, they agreed to the marriage, but not without privately expressing hesitation. Earl’s family was concerned that the cultural differences between the couple were too great to endure in a lasting relationship. They gave Earl the classic “it will

never last... she will never be happy with you..." talk. I asked him how he felt about that and he simply said: "love is love." Their concern was a common concern of parents everywhere, the bride and groom were from very different backgrounds and it was not what they were expecting for their son.

In July 2016, Sue was with her family in Izmir preparing for her wedding. They heard on the news about the alleged coup attempt on July 15, but it was not happening near them and they were not overly concerned. They were busy with the wedding planning and were not paying close attention to what was happening in politics. Her mother was somewhat frustrated that the dress had not yet been selected and the date was coming fast. Sue's father spoke with her privately and, according to Sue, said something like "listen here young lady, you are driving your mother crazy... I insist you go tomorrow and get a dress for this wedding... so we can have peace in this house..."

Later, in the early morning hours, there would be no peace in the house; the police raided the apartments, arrested and detained nearly everyone there.<sup>13</sup> The soldiers arrested everyone and took them all; except Sue, her grandmother, and the baby (Sue's cousin's child). The family members were all charged with various indictments of terrorism accusing them of being associated with Hizmet. All of their assets were frozen or seized, including Sue's father's business interests and home. As luck would have it, Sue's brother and sister happened to be away at their schools at the time and were not detained; and because Sue had been abroad for a number of years and could not be definitively identified she had not been included in the arrest warrant.

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<sup>13</sup> The raid on the apartments occurred approximately 1 week after the alleged coup attempt on July 15, 2016.

After approximately another week, it became obvious to the couple that the situation would not be resolved quickly and they both said they were concerned for their safety as well if they were to remain in Türkiye. They made the decision to be married in a civil ceremony and return to Asia to start new teaching positions together in a new International English Language school. They said that an important part of this decision was that they would be able to financially assist Sue's sister who was finishing high school at the time, and help her to get to university while the parents were sorting out these legal problems.

Sue's mother was detained for 18 months and was released for humanitarian reasons because of serious health issues she developed while in prison. Sue gets emotional when she describes the experience – first, she describes the night when the raid happened as “a living nightmare that you cannot believe is happening.” She said that none of what happened made sense because the soldiers were people they knew from the neighborhood and they could not understand why they were behaving this way. She said her father and several others repeated “why are you doing this... you know who we are... we are good people... we have known you since you were young boys, how can you do this to us?” Sue said it was very difficult for her to even look at her mother because she was crying and so frightened. Sue described her mother as a person who was always very strong and nothing seemed to ever “shake her up” and then when this happened she had no words to describe how her mother seemed so helpless.

Sue's father was detained for 30 months and when he was released he came out to “nothing.” He came out of prison with the attitude that “they” would not break him. Sue said they may have taken everything from him, but he still had his mind and his abilities. So, he started repairing men's shoes on the street. He would go every day and do whatever work he

could find and repair shoes until he built his business back. He worked very hard at whatever work he could find and has steadily been able to regain some of what was lost.

In 2018, elections were held in Turkey. Sue's mother went to vote. She felt strongly it was her right to participate in the democratic process. She presented her identification card at the polling station. She was arrested and returned to prison because her name appeared on a list. She spent another six months in prison. I asked Sue why she thought this happened. Sue said her parents still believe very strongly in the rule of law and they still believe that the courts and judiciary will do "the right thing." On September 1, 2023, Sue's father took her mother to the hospital for an urgent care visit related to the heart condition she developed while she was in prison. A few minutes after they checked in at the desk her father was arrested and detained... his name appeared on a list.<sup>14</sup>

Earl's family, on the other hand, have distanced themselves from their son. They have occasional contact and are not at all interested or associated with Hizmet. When I first interviewed the couple, they were very excited about exploring the United States and seeing "this great nation." They enjoy inviting guests to their home and Sue's mother enjoys checking on the details of the meal. They use a video connection and Sue and her mother discuss the details of the menu, the place settings, and the decorations. Technology has allowed them to have frequent communication with each other and maintain a close connection. Earl said that sometimes his family does not have any interest in what he is doing, but he is so happy that Sue has her mother and can talk to her whenever she wants. Of

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<sup>14</sup> At the time of this document, Sue's father is, once again, detained in prison awaiting another trial.

course, they are both extremely concerned about the situation with Sue's father and his recent detention.

I asked Sue why she wanted to be a teacher. She said: "only education can change the world – my parents taught me this – my mother and my father encouraged me to continue my teaching because they believe education will change the world – even when they went to prison they say these things – when the people are educated then the people will understand what is the reality so they will learn how to follow-up their rights which will have an effect on their lives and their future generations. They say that by getting a good education then you can make your good decisions." I asked her what she thought "good education" looked like and she said: "...if the teachers only focus on one model then the students do not get the complete idea about things... you have to try many different things to get the idea across because each student may learn in different ways..."

Earl and Sue have both expressed exasperation at the current conditions in Türkiye and are especially concerned with the circumstances surrounding their families. They have described the sensation of helplessness "...what can we do..." which is a really the question we must all be asking. R-Man, the next story to be shared, is asking similar questions about his family except that his family is not in Türkiye, but is anxiously awaiting the issuance of their visas in Turkmenistan.

### **R-Man's Story**

R-Man is a new arrival to the teaching faculty at the charter school group in the same midwestern city as Earl and Sue.<sup>15</sup> R-Man was born in the 1980s, and is a citizen of,

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<sup>15</sup> R-Man requested that he not be identified because at the time of this publication he was awaiting "the papers" (visas) for his wife and children who remain in Turkmenistan.

Turkmenistan a former member country of the Soviet Union (USSR). Turkmenistan remains a country that has very limited access to the outside world; the government controls internet access and the media. R-Man described the country as “completely closed.” As a member state of the USSR, the Turkmen were not allowed to worship freely and the country technical still remains a secular state although its political structure is steeped in Islamic tradition.<sup>16</sup> Their religious roots date back to the nomadic days of the Ottoman reign and are an amalgamation of Islam and pre-Islamic practices.<sup>17</sup> R-Man said that it was highly unusual for a Turkmen to choose to come to the United States because anti-western sentiment is “not a discussion, it is an absolute.”

Shortly after the fall of the USSR, in 1991 the Gülen Movement established schools in Turkmenistan, and R-Man attended one of these “Turkish” high schools on a scholarship.

In the former Soviet Union, a faith-based social movement is contributing to the Muslim people’s transition out of the communist experience. Since the USSR fell in 1991, adherents of the spiritual movement inspired by Turkish cleric Fethullah Gülen have been building schools, offering English-language courses for adults, and consciously supporting a freer public sphere throughout Eurasia. On the whole, the Gülen Movement (cemaat<sup>18</sup>) plays a vital role in offering Central Asia’s youth an alternative to state-sponsored schooling. “Turkish schools,” as they are colloquially known, contribute to Central Asia’s post-Soviet transition with a unique pedagogy and a willingness to accommodate local laws and standards.<sup>19</sup>

R-Man’s mother, now deceased, wanted only the best for her son, and felt that the opportunity to send him to this prestigious school was a very important and high priority for

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<sup>16</sup> Turkmen is the national cultural identity of the people of Turkmenistan.

<sup>17</sup> Victoria Clement, "Religion and the Secular State in Turkmenistan," *Central Asia-Caucasus Institute and Silk Road Studies Program* (2020).

<sup>18</sup> The word “cemaat” in Turkish means “community” which is what the author of this quote chose to use to describe the Hizmet people.

<sup>19</sup> Victoria Clement, "Faith-Based Schools in Post-Soviet Turkmenistan," *European Education* 43, no. 1 (2011): 76-92.



R-Man's future. R-Man stated that his father had left the family when he was three or four years old and that he did not remember him. He had the opportunity to meet his father when he was 23 but felt as though he was meeting a stranger and did not feel a connection to him. R-Man studied hard and did well in school and was given a scholarship by the Hizmet community to Gaziantep University where he graduated with a degree in Applied Mathematics. R-Man returned to Turkmenistan began his teaching career, completed his compulsory military service for one year, met the woman who would become his wife and started his family. For R-Man, his wife, and children, life was very good.

Everything changed after the summer of 2016. The ripple effects of the alleged coup were not immediately felt, but soon afterwards the government began to harass the teachers and administrators of the schools. Word soon came, the businessmen who worked to fund the schools had been detained by the Turkmenistan government. It was suspected that someone from the Turkish government had made the arrangements but, according to R-Man, no one knew for certain what had happened.

I asked R-Man to explain further what he meant – was he sharing a conspiracy story that was circulating or was this coming through the media – how did he know what was happening. At this point his story became a little difficult to follow. I believe the difficulty was partly based in my inability to understand what it is truly like to live in a country where the things the government does seems absurd. R-Man said that government officials would call “them” in about once per month and question them. I asked “who?” “Who was being called in and who was doing the calling?” He said: “No, you can't understand what I mean... you can't understand what it was like because they have nothing like that here...” I said “Well, then tell me what it was like...” He said “they are the people from the government...”

they are like the authorities... they would make us come to their office... all of us from the school..." I said: "so you mean all of the teachers?" He said: "yes, and all of the rest of the people, like the administrators and faculty..." I then asked: "What did they do to you?" He said: "They questioned us and made sure we understood we were not to be in any way like Hizmet... it was like brain washing..." He then said: "By 2018 I had to quit (teaching)... I couldn't take it any more... the pressure was too great..." When he told this part of his story, R-Man was filled with emotion, he wasn't really able to be more specific, but I could feel his pain and the depth of his suffering coming through in his words. As soon as we moved on to talk about his family and his new job teaching in the United States, the smile returned to his face and his demeanor lightened significantly.

I wanted to know more about the background of some of R-Man's story because it seemed hard to believe that a citizen from a country more than 1300 miles away would be impacted by a political situation in Türkiye.<sup>20</sup> In June 2017 Human Rights Watch published an article that described the arrest, torture and conviction of 18 businessmen with alleged ties to Hizmet.<sup>21</sup> R-Man had good reason to be very worried about what was happening to him; his concerns were validated by Human Rights Watch. See Figure 6-2 for a clip from the Human Rights Watch report. I discovered further evidence in a "Turkmen News" website

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<sup>20</sup> The distance between Turkey and Turkmenistan is 2,101 kilometers (1,305 miles). Source: Geodatos, <https://www.geodatos.net/en/distances/countries/from-turkey-to-turkmenistan>.

<sup>21</sup> "Joint NGO Statement on Torture and Trials in Turkmenistan," Human Rights Watch, (June 9, 2017), <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/06/09/joint-ngo-statement-torture-and-trials-turkmenistan>.

Media reports said that the men were among over 100 people detained in September and October, 2016 over suspected links to the Turkmen-Turkish schools or the International Turkmen-Turkish University, which are understood to have previously been affiliated with Fethullah Gülen and the global Islamic movement, Hizmet.<sup>[2]</sup> Sixteen of the 18 convicted men either went to universities in Turkey or had been teachers, alumni, or staff at schools that are believed to have been affiliated with Gülen and Hizmet. Of the remaining two, one was a supporter of the schools and another taught at a school run by alleged Hizmet sympathizers.

They were detained by the 6<sup>th</sup> Department, the unit to combat organized crime in the Internal Affairs Ministry. While most of those detained were subsequently released, these 18 men were held in a pre-trial detention center in Yashlyk, Ahal province, until their trial in February 2017.

Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International received allegations that the 18 men were tortured and held in inhumane conditions in pre-trial detention. The information suggests that the men were held naked in darkened rooms for long periods and repeatedly beaten. A 19<sup>th</sup> man detained at the same time may have died as a result of torture, but this has been impossible to confirm.

Figure 6-2: Arrested, detained and tortured in Turkmenistan.

article regarding the mistreatment of teachers affiliated with the Hizmet movement, see Figure 6-3.<sup>22</sup>

I asked R-Man why he chose to come to the United States to teach. First, foremost, he said he felt it would be the best opportunity for his sons to grow up in a country that knows freedom. He said that in Turkmenistan they are not free. They do not have access to the things we have here and I want them to have the best future possible. He also said that through his Hizmet connections he knew that the United States was much different than what he had been told in Turkmenistan. He conveyed a sense of a more worldly view of life

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<sup>22</sup> Turkmen News, September 9, 2019, <https://en.turkmen.news/human-rights/alleged-gulenist-in-critical-condition-in-turkmen-prison/>.

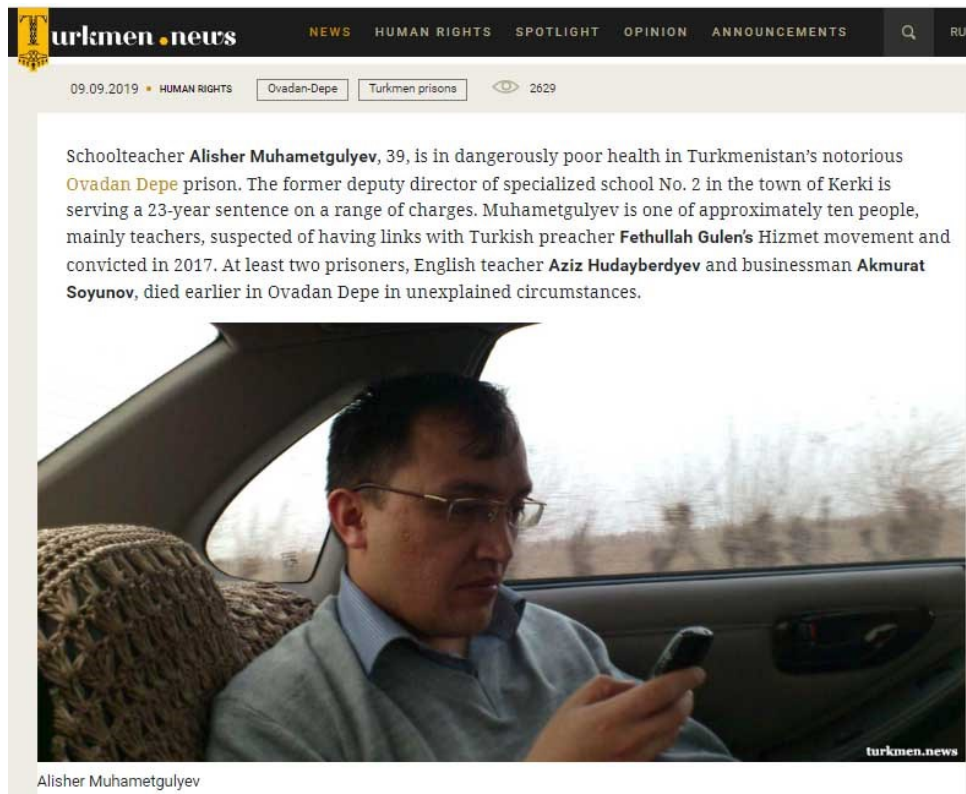


Figure 6-3: Teachers imprisoned in Turkmenistan

because had studied at the university in Türkiye and had been exposed to life outside of Turkmenistan.

I asked R-Man what he liked about his job teaching at the charter school. The expression on his face really said it all. His eyes even seemed to be smiling. He said that he loved to teach math and teach it in such a way that “the kids (students) learn to love it as much as I do.” Just as he made this statement, one of his friends popped his head in and spoke He said “I walked by his classroom this week and the board was completely covered in numbers and symbols... none of it made sense to me... but the students all seemed to be in agreement with him...” and the two men laughed as if it were a special joke between them.

## CHAPTER 7

### CONCLUSIONS: INTERPRETATIONS AND MOVING FORWARD



Figure 7-1: “Everything begins with a little seed.” Aslihan Kas, AST Volunteer

I wrote the poem in Figure 7-1 and it was included in part of the Un-Muted presentation I gave in Kansas City in September 2022. Aslihan Kas used its concept as part of her presentation in Washington, D.C. when she introduced the Un-Muted Exhibit at the Human Rights Festival in August 2023. She, and others like her, are dedicated to advocacy work which they define as the un-silencing of the voices of the social genocide of the Hizmet people. Aslihan has not only heard the cries of the victims and witnessed first hand the

devastation this circumstance has created, but she and her family are also survivors of the genocide. The trauma she experienced has become the source of inspiration for her work as an advocate for others. She is a volunteer who averages more than 40 hours per week working on projects for Advocates of Silenced Turkey (AST). Her focus is continuously on ensuring the voices of the victims of the Hizmet genocide are not left silenced. In her presentation in D.C., she reflected on what it was like for herself and her family to have fled Türkiye to resettle in the United States; she said:

*Aslihan Kas: Exile is where you are strange, that is why I will not call these lands 'exile.' This country where we live freely and take care of what we left behind is not a foreign land for us... we are in a country where we rebuild our lives while we face our pains... we commemorate that life goes on despite so much suffering, we feel we are strong together to our knees, we have been strengthened through our kinship, and we say to the deceased 'we have not forgotten you.' We laugh, we cry, we work hard, and most important we will not cease these efforts.<sup>1</sup>*

I asked Aslihan how she had the idea for the Un-Muted project and she said:

*Aslihan Kas: I met with some friends and we just started with ideas. We invited the families to send items they felt were important to them. Something we could use for the display to show the world how real the life was that the item belonged to. You know, we had to smuggle many of these items out of Turkey, but the families were willing to risk it because they do not want their loved ones to be forgotten. We posted on social media (in Turkish): 'We will announce the genocide*

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<sup>1</sup> Aslihan sent a copy of her comments made in Washington, DC, to me translated from Turkish to English. She and I have worked closely on a number of projects together, both in person and virtually, including gathering some of the data for this research.

*experienced by your loved ones throughout America, and we will share it with the world.’ Then the people responded and we were really surprised by how many people wanted to send us their things. When we received the relics, we took great care of them with the awareness that people sent them as if they were sending their hearts and hopes to us... Those people trusted us and agreed to send those priceless memories thousands of miles away... What brings us together here is neither our religion, race, nor worldview. Instead, what brings us together is kindness and love. Only the seeds of kindness and understanding will grow into redeemers of the world. (Figure 7-2 is the flier announcing the program in Washington, DC)*

Aslihan and her family may be refugees in a foreign land, but they have now successfully made the United States their home. Aslihan, her husband, and her teen-age children are all active in advocacy work in support of the victims of the Hizmet genocide. When they made the decision as a family to leave Türkiye it was very difficult and frightening. They were separated for two years in the process of relocating to the United States. Aslihan’s husband used a war-torn region of northern Iraq as his escape route from Türkiye which was very dangerous. He described the terrain as unbelievably rugged and unforgiving with alarming political instability in the region. He chuckles when he tells the story now, but it is the kind of story that would “turn a mother’s hair grey” (his words) if she knew what her son was doing at the time. Aslihan, on the other hand, disguised herself and the children, snuck onto a cruise ship and stowed away until they reached safety. She said she was “terrified” and so afraid of what might happen to the children if they were caught. Aslihan has a pending nine-year prison sentence awaiting her in Türkiye should she ever return. Her crime is that she is Hizmet and was teaching in a Hizmet school.

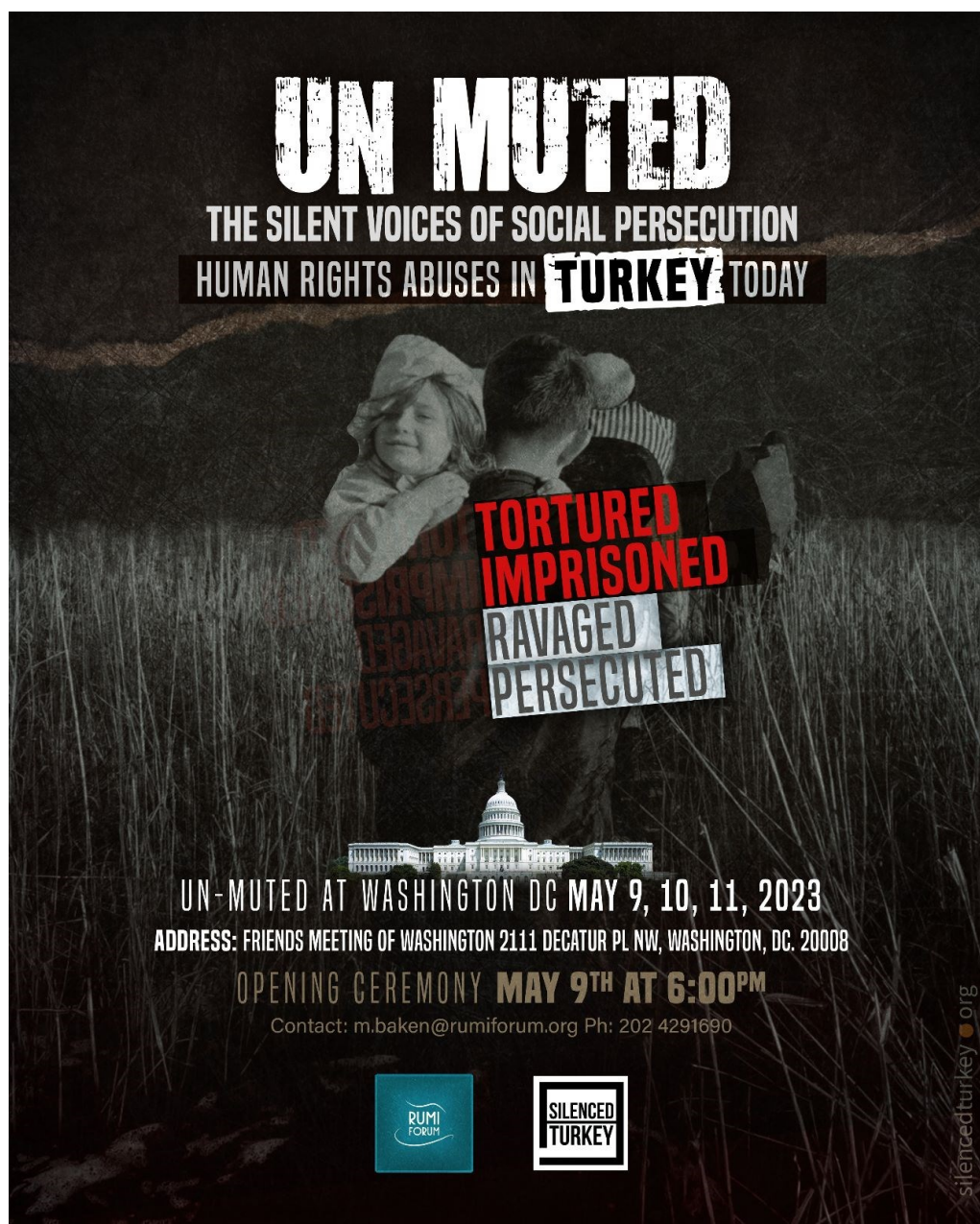


Figure 7-2: Un-Muted Flier used for the program held in Washington, DC, May 2023.

When you hear these stories, you might think they cannot possibly be true. How could there be such danger in the world? One of Aslihan's best friends and her children perished in their attempt to escape. Aslihan becomes very emotional when she tells the story of her friend; she expresses both raging anger and unquenchable sadness at the loss.



## The Story of the Akçabay Family

Murat and Hatice Akçabay were teachers in a Hizmet school in Türkiye. They had three very active sons who were very young and, as my mother would say, full of “vip, vim and vigor.” As you can imagine a house with three little boys in constant motion made life very full for the family. Murat and Hatice were both teachers and wanted nothing but the very best for their children. As they attempted to flee the country by crossing the Maritsa River, their boat capsized and Hatice and the three boys drowned. Really, nothing can be written to sufficiently describe the depth of grief this family and their friends have experienced knowing this tragedy could have been avoided. Figure 7-3 is a photo of the Un-Muted Exhibit artifacts from the Akçabay family.



Figure 7-3: Artifacts from the Un-Muted Exhibit provided by the Akçabay family.

Excerpt from the text in the Un-Muted booklet describing the artifacts in the exhibit (as depicted in the photo in Figure 7-3):

The educational institution where Murat Akçabay and Hatice Akçabay worked was closed because it was related to the Hizmet Movement. They had to go into hiding for 23 months when a call record was made against them due to their connection with the Hizmet Movement. Their concern was that both of them would be arrested and their three children would be left behind. Unemployment, not being able to have children treated when they are sick, and being deprived of all social rights, the couple decided to leave Turkey when those conditions reached an unbearable point. While trying to cross the Maritsa River to Greece at midnight on July 18, 2018, their boat overturned.

Hatice Akçabay(36), and her three sons Ahmet Esat(6), Mesut(5), and Bekir Aras(1) died in the waters of Maritsa due to the accident. Only her husband Murat Akçabay remained from the family.<sup>2</sup>

It is stories such as these that motivate human rights advocates such as Aslihan and her committee to work tirelessly for justice. The stories shared in this historical research provide but a glimpse into the lived experiences of individuals who have made tremendous sacrifices to simply survive this horrific genocide. It is only through the efforts of advocates such as Aslihan, Hafza Girdap, and countless others, that these stories are coming present to the light of day.

### **Come and Get Me, Hafza Girdap**

Hafza is the Executive Director of Advocates of Silenced Turkey, and a PhD Candidate and Instructor at Stoney Point University in Long Island, New York. Figure 7-4 is a profile photo of Hafza Girdap.

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<sup>2</sup> The text in the quote is the indecipherable print from the placard in the photo with the description of the family. It was also printed in a booklet that was distributed at the event that was prepared and reprinted by AST Publishing.

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## Hafza Girdap

Nonresident Research Associate



Figure 7-4: Hafza Girdap,  
Executive Director of Advocates of Silenced Turkey

Hafza is an amazing activist who never seems to tire in her work although she is often frustrated by a seeming lack of progress with resolving the Hizmet issue in Türkiye. I have met many people who are very upset and hurt by everything that is happening in Türkiye; but, in my opinion, Hafza takes her advocacy work to the next level. She uses social media to inform followers of things that are happening in Türkiye as events unfold. A fair estimate is that she sends out four to five posts, minimum, per day, every day, on the platform *X*, formerly known as Twitter. All of the posts concern activities of the Erdoğan regime directed against Hizmet or Kurdish people. Figure 7-5 is an excerpt and photo from her presentation in Washington DC.

The oppression did not start with us, and unfortunately it will not end with us. Turkey's people have experienced numerous massacres, enforced disappearances, arbitrary detentions, and torture. There are hundreds of sick and elderly people in prisons today. Many of these people are prisoners of conscience and political prisoners. There are people who lost their lives due to these evil cruelties. This is just social genocide!

Halime Gulsu, Garibe Gezer, Mustafa Kabakcioglu, Gokhan Acikkollu, Tahir Elci, Ahmet Burhan Atac, Cemile Cagirga, Ceylan Onku...

These are not just statistics, these are not just numbers.  
These are people.  
They have their stories.  
Told and untold... incomplete stories...

We will tell their stories and continue to seek justice for them; everywhere, on every platform we can reach, always...



Last edited 4:57 AM · Sep 18, 2023 · 34.5K Views

Figure 7-5: Hafza presenting her comments at the Washington DC Un-Muted Exhibit. May 2023.

Figure 7-6 is a social media post by Hafza Girdap with a photo of a child in the prison with his mother. In Türkiye it is not uncommon for small children to be taken to detention with their mothers or for pregnant women to give birth in the prison and keep the infant with them during the detainment, or very young babies with them when they are taken to prison.



Figure 7-6: Hafza Re-Tweeted this post. One of many children in the prisons with their mothers.

I have spoken to Hafza a number of times and my impression is that her abundance of energy stems from her resistance to the duration and intensity of the humanitarian struggle of kindred spirits. Hafza is the embodiment of Hizmet and a true humanitarian. She is the person in the room who would say aloud what everyone is thinking “Why? Why is this happening?” Her advocacy work has elevated her to being listed on a high security, terrorist threat, arrest warrant list in Türkiye (See Appendix D for a copy of the list). Hafza said: “I consider this arrest warrant as the highest honor because it is an indicator that my work has

been noticed by Erdoğan and I have his attention.” I asked her if she was afraid MIT (Turkish Intelligence) might try to come to the U.S. to find her and she said: “Come and get me... Let them come, I am ready for them, this is my country now and I am free to speak the truth...”

### **Concluding Remarks and Interpretations**

Both beauty and historical “fact” are in the eye of the beholder. The perspective and position of the storyteller is the reference point that gives the record meaning, and in these stories is the counter-narrative to the dominant political voice of a powerful country. The beauty of the stories that were shared as a part of this research is that they were so very personal and meaningful to each of the participants. The facts the stories represent give us insight into the lived experience of individuals walking through and living day-to-day as survivors of the Hizmet genocide. The stories contained herein provide an intimate glimpse into the tragedy of unbridled power. Ub is a historian whose passion for teaching is evident; yet, through no fault of his own, he may never have the opportunity to be a professor in a prestigious Turkish university again. Fethullah Gülen, himself, the man who started a global movement to build a peaceful society has lived in exile for more than 20 years. Serkan and Melike, Earl and Sue had already dedicated their lives to teaching abroad when they were forced to move to the United States to seek safe harbor. Melek and Furkan Çetinkaya had to fight their way into exile after arrests and prison detentions. EEK and his family made the best of his prison sentence and await on proverbial egg shells the fate of his wife’s pending sentence. Ha, a history teacher struggling to survive after enduring a horrific prison sentence, is now attending university once again to become a professional jewelry designer. Ali and the family of *The Baby in the Bag* fled under cover of night across treacherous conditions to seek refuge in a safe country and are now adapting to new culture and language as refugees. Zabit Kişi, and thousands more like him, remain in prison. Gökhan Açikkollu, an educator among

the first martyrs of the torture, and Ragip Enes Katran, a student on the Bosphorus Bridge, and Hatice Akçabay and her sons all lost their lives in circumstances in incomprehensible circumstances. As Ali said, they, and so many others like them, were “good people.” Mina Leyla, Aslihan Kas, Hafza Girdap and countless others continue to toil tirelessly in an effort to inform, enlighten and advocate so that the suffering of others may be relieved.

These are the stories that will likely never be recorded in official text books within Turkic curriculum. They offer counter-narrative from the fringe of society that tie into the power of local knowledge. It is through such local knowledge that we have the opportunity to develop a critical pedagogy that leads to a practice of freedom and equity for all people. According to Giroux, using a critical lens to develop pedagogy from authentic knowledge is how we should prepare students to be informed citizens with civic imagination.<sup>3</sup> This research has led me to believe we have the opportunity to develop pedagogy that uses a critical lens to balance local knowledge couched in authentic oral history that leads to informed advocacy on behalf of voices that have been silenced.

The question guiding this research was to illuminate the factors that led to the development of Hizmet education in Türkiye and abroad. The stories shared in this historical research reveal the heart of Hizmet education evolved through the enlightenment of educators committed to a vocational practice steeped in authentic Islamic faith. In the face of potential torture and possible death, these educators and students refused to deny their core Hizmet values surrounding service as guided by the light of Qur’anic principals led in a movement by the Imam, Fethullah Gülen. Although they were unable to articulate specific

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<sup>3</sup> Henry A. Giroux, "Rethinking Education as the Practice of Freedom: Paulo Freire and the Promise of Critical Pedagogy," *Policy Futures in Education* 8, no. 6 (2010): 715-721.

pedagogical practices, what appeared to set them apart was their deep commitment to their vocation which they described as being a purpose given to them by Allah.

When a spider weaves a web, it is intended as a trap; its purpose is to capture prey. In Türkiye, the political web woven by the Erdoğan regime appears to be intended to ensnare and silence the voices dissent to the AKP's shift toward authoritarian use of political power. The history of the Ottoman Empire set the course for the use of military force and might as a means of social control in the relatively young Republic of Turkey. Ub was silenced by the stripping of his position as a respected professor in a prestigious university. His fate is yet to be decided in the courts and he lives under the cloud of uncertainty daily. Academic freedom is something we prize highly in the United States, however, in Türkiye it is non-existent.

Serkan and Melike lived more than 2,000 miles (3,350 kilometers) away from Türkiye and had been teaching in Kyrgyzstan for nearly 20 years.<sup>4</sup> In Serkan's words, "what did we have to do with anything that was happening there?" Their children were born in Kyrgyzstan and knew no other homeland. Now Serkan and Melike are educators in the U.S. and their family is adapting to a new homeland very different in culture and language to what they were accustomed to previously. Zabit Kişi is serving a twenty-year prison sentence after having endured torture and his family has been left to survive without him. He was likely targeted because of his visibility in the community as a leader at what was a well-respected and highly regarded school. He was a school administrator in Kazakhstan which is only slightly closer to Türkiye than Kyrgyzstan (1700 miles between the countries), and was not

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<sup>4</sup> The distance between Kyrgyzstan and Turkey is 3,351 kilometers (2,082 miles). Source: Geodatos, <https://www.geodatos.net/en/distances/countries/from-kyrgyzstan-to-turkey>.



involved in any political upheaval occurring in Türkiye, yet the Kyrgyz government turned an eye to his abduction.<sup>5</sup>

The second purpose of this research was to illuminate the experiences of educators and students who had a story to tell about being caught in the web of political deceit and treachery of a regime bent toward quashing the voice of dissent. The stories told revealed, at the very least, a pattern of disruption to educators working both in Türkiye and abroad, some of whom are now teaching in the U.S. The abrupt closing of schools throughout Türkiye and allied countries has come at a great cost to students who no longer have access to these educational opportunities. Imprisonment, torture and death are not something we would expect to associate with education, and yet it has happened, and continues to occur in Türkiye.

The last of the three purposes I intended to investigate was to interrogate Hizmet pedagogical practices. Although some of the stories touched on the subject, most did not specifically address the topic. I realized, throughout the interviews, I was not given any direct responses to questions surrounding specific pedagogical practices. Such questions as “what do you do in your classroom that is different from other teachers? What sets your technique apart from a non-Hizmet teacher?” Perhaps, I understand why they were unable to give a direct answer. It is because I believe a vocation is like Kool-Aid in water; once you put it in, it cannot be separated from the water. I, myself, have experienced a vocational call to serve in my religious commitment, and have heard what I believe to be the voice of God leading me to the work of advocacy for those in need. I understand well the inability to separate the

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<sup>5</sup> The distance between Kazakhstan and Turkey is 2,729 kilometers (1,696 miles). Source: Geodatos, <https://www.geodatos.net/en/distances/countries/from-kazakhstan-to-turkey>.

sense of commitment to the work God has called me to from daily life. As Aslihan mentioned, it comes from seeds planted. We cannot harvest that which is not planted, cultivated and cared for; which is the summation of advocacy work and becomes like Kool-Aid in our lives. As educators and advocates we never separate ourselves from the vocation that pulses through our veins like water.

When I was school-age, my mother sent me to Saint Therese's elementary school. It was a Roman Catholic school in the Diocese of Kansas City, Missouri, with the Sisters of Saint Francis from Savannah, Missouri, as the women at the helm. In the U.S., there is a good bit of mythology surrounding the pedagogical practices of Roman Catholic sisters that involves harsh discipline and punishment. However, the sisters at Saint Therese were Franciscans which meant they were led by a unique charism.

As they announce peace with their lips, let them be careful to have it even more within their own hearts. No one should be roused to wrath or insult on their account; rather all should be moved to peace, goodwill, and mercy because of their gentleness.  
- Rule of Saint Francis<sup>6</sup>

The charism of the Sisters was led by the Rule of Saint Francis which meant, each of the sisters had made vows to God to live together in a community that was committed to living by the Rule of Saint Francis. My memory of Roman Catholic Education in the 1960s was of teachers who were kind and gentle even when they were redirecting student behavior. At the time, I did not know this was unusual. I remember once I forged my mother's name on a Scholastic Book order. I was called to the office and had to speak to my mother on the phone to tell her what I had done. I explained I had forgotten to get the signature and apologized to my mother. My punishment from Sister Dominica was to sit in the chapel for a

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<sup>6</sup> Source: Sisters of Saint Francis website, <https://www.sistersofstfrancis.org/>.

bit of time and explain to God what I had done, to listen in silence to what God had to say to me, and then to ask for God's forgiveness. It was highly effective because I was ashamed that God knew what I had done and did not want that to happen again. It never once occurred to me at the time that other children attending different schools had experiences that were far less kind or effective. This is an example of how unaware I was of the pedagogical practice of discipline the sisters at the school used as their method, especially compared to what was happening in other schools. I have since become aware other Catholic schools had far more severe discipline practices and have always been grateful the Franciscans modeled a method that made sense to me.

The Hizmet teachers who shared their stories and have come to teach in the charter schools, are unaware of the pedagogical practices of their American counter-parts because they do not have a prior experience of public education in the United States. When I asked the educators in this study to describe what made their pedagogy unique, they were not able to articulate specific differences between their methods and those of others. None of them specifically mentioned the connection between their Hizmet beliefs and their practice in the classroom. I believe that a big part of the reason for this is that they have been conditioned by their fears not to associate aloud their teaching practice with their Hizmet beliefs as a result of the genocide. Their voices had been, effectively, silenced.

In addition to the physical sound produced by a human being, voice is a means of conveying information and communicating. More importantly, voice is the ability of an individual to connect what they want to say to a "meaningful, acknowledged presence."<sup>7</sup> In

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<sup>7</sup> Alison Cook-Sather, "Sound, Presence, and Power: 'Student Voice' in Educational Research and Reform," *Curriculum Inquiry* 36, no. 4 (2006): 363.

other words, convey meaning out of personal experience. The most significant result of this research has been the transformative effect of voice empowerment given to the storytellers. Storytelling is a means of empowering voice; and is dependent on the opportunity to articulate events and memories in a language the listener can comprehend and understand. It is through storytelling “way we make sense of our lives.”<sup>8</sup> Our stories reveal our identity and offer a glimpse into how we see and experience the world and give meaning to the events that occur in the course of our lives. The invitation that was extended to each storyteller in this research, opened the door of opportunity for them to make sense of events and report historical facts from their lived experiences.

In many ways, their silence reminded me of the experiences of the LGBT+ community in the United States commonly referred to as “being in the closet;” hiding one’s identity whilst walking among hetero-normalized dominance. They go about their daily lives and work as teachers, but the uniqueness of their methods is left unspoken. However, just like the Franciscan sisters, the charisma of Hizmet educators permeates their being and leads them to a higher purpose; one in which their teaching practice is enmeshed in religious beliefs surrounding a purpose toward uplifting lives.

### **Significance of this Research**

It goes without saying, every voice matters; or, at least, every voice should matter. The voices shared in this historical research are expressions of the value and dignity of the human lives of educators and students who have been caught in a tangled web of political power. Their lives, and the lives of countless others, have been indelibly altered by their

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<sup>8</sup> Gary Colombo, Bonnie Lisle, & Sandra Mano, *Framework: Culture, Storytelling and College Writing* (Boston: Bedford Books, 1997).

experiences of social genocide. While it is true, we can look around the world and find many instances of senseless violence, wars and genocides, this particular set of circumstances raises serious concerns in the arena of global education.

First of all, if it can happen in Türkiye, it can happen anywhere. Türkiye is a modern nation, member of NATO and a political ally to the United States. A discussion of the question about why, or if, the State Department of the U.S. has or has not, intervened in this situation is far beyond the scope of this research with one brief observation: the U.S. has granted asylum to Hizmet individuals based on credible claims of persecution and has refused to extradite Fethullah Gülen to Türkiye since his exile in the U.S. from Türkiye in 1999.<sup>9</sup> In some ways the U.S. lacks motivation to intervene because of its NATO alliance and, perhaps more subtly, the benefits the US receives from Hizmet educators working in charter schools positioned in underserved communities.

The second issue is the unquantifiable impact to education with the Erdoğan regime's summarily closing of universities, high schools, and elementary schools throughout Türkiye and nations within its political reach. By 2017, 15 universities had been closed in Türkiye due to their link to the Gülen Movement impacting more than 66,000 students.<sup>10</sup> In my interview with Ub he said: "8,000 academicians lost their jobs (when they closed the universities) and their teaching credentials, and they were charged in the court just like me... and many of them have been sent to the prisons..." The sudden loss of 15 universities with combined enrollments exceeding 66,000 students can only have resulted in negative

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<sup>9</sup> Fait Muedini, "The Politics Between the Justice and Development Party (AKP) and the Gülen Movement in Turkey: Issues of Human Rights and Rising Authoritarianism," *Muslim World Journal of Human Rights* 12, no. 1 (2015): 99-122.

<sup>10</sup> Hizmet Movement Archive

immediate consequences for all of those individuals, both students and educators, caught in this political maneuver. The 66,000 students would all have been identified as having an affiliation with Hizmet and their names would have appeared on lists that would result in arrests, just as Ali had been tagged in his pursuits at the university. It follows to say, if those students attempted to enroll in state-run Turkish universities then, they too, would potentially suffer the same fate as Ali and be arrested and detained.

I spoke with a young woman named Bre.<sup>11</sup> She was a student and had just completed her junior year (third year) at Suleyman Sah University, and she was home on summer break visiting her parents when the events of July 15, 2016 occurred. Her parents were working abroad in an International school in Pakistan. Her father was the principal and her mother both taught and worked in administration at the school.

In November 2016, Pakistan ordered all Turkish teachers associated with the PakTurk school system to leave the country. The teachers and their families, numbering about 450 people, were given three days' notice to leave, the school said in a statement at the time.<sup>12</sup>

As she recalls, her parents were given one week's notice to evacuate Pakistan, by the Pakistani authorities. Bre said the Pakistani's concern was to get the people out of Pakistan so that Türkiye would be satisfied they were not harboring the Hizmet people, then branded as "terrorists" by the Erdoğan regime. Bre said she believed that had they not left quickly, they would likely have been returned to Türkiye via an abduction by Turkish security forces wherein they would have been charged and detained. There were other families in Pakistan

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<sup>11</sup> Bre is the pseudo name for a woman who, with her family, is now living and working in North America.

<sup>12</sup> Hasim, Asad, "Missing Turkish Teacher 'Deported from Pakistan'," Al Jazeera, October 16, 2017, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2017/10/16/missing-turkish-teacher-deported-from-pakistan>.

working at the same International School who were kidnapped by MIT, returned to Türkiye and detained. One such family was the Kaçmaz family. According to sources, the Kaçmaz family was abducted in the middle of the night by security forces unrelated to Pakistan (likely MIT).<sup>13</sup> According to witnesses, Mesut, his wife and two daughters were restrained, blindfolded and hooded before being whisked away to a secret facility. They were held for 17 days in Pakistan and then flown to Türkiye. The daughters were released after an additional 20 hours and the parents were detained. The parents were held for an undetermined amount of time (perhaps six months) and released to await additional court proceedings (February 2018). Not long after their release they fled to Canada to seek safe harbor. Bre is convinced she and her family would have been treated in the same manner had they not fled Pakistan in the manner in which they did.

When Bre was informed of the University closing, she traveled to the U.S. to stay with friends. She said watched the situation unfold on her phone by monitoring social media and the news closely. Her university appeared on the list of schools shut-down and was the fifteenth, and last school, to close. In her words, Bre said “it seemed surreal... like how could this really be happening in today’s world? I couldn’t really grasp what was going on... first, I was all of the way in Pakistan and so far away from everything I left behind... it felt like a movie on television and that I would maybe be able to switch it off and go on about my life... things would return to normal after the episode was over... but each day it kept getting worse and I saw my parents in a situation I never expected... In Turkish there is a saying

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<sup>13</sup> “Meral & Mesut Kaçmaz,” *Turkey Tribunal*, Downloaded December 13, 2023, <https://turkeytribunal.org/the-witnesses/mesut-kacmaz/>.

‘every mountain gets as much snow as it can hold’ and I am grateful my family has survived thus far, and I pray for those who are still in the midst of their winter.”

She sought admission to a number of universities in the U.S., including George Mason, but was rejected because she could not meet the admissions standards. Her applications were denied because she did not have access to official transcripts since everything, including all of the records, at the university where she previously attended vanished. When the Turkish government closed Suleyman Sah University, to the outside world it was as if this university never existed. Fortunately, for this young woman, she had a copy of all of her transcripts (unofficial), grade reports, syllabi and other course documents. She eventually proved her case and was accepted by the University of the District of Columbia and completed her degree in Psychology. She has since gone on to complete a Master’s degree in Counseling at George Washington University in 2021. She is now working as a psychotherapist and has often been instrumental in caring for immigrants suffering from trauma related to abrupt relocations. She is among the fortunate, others lost their records and have had to restart their pursuits of higher education from the beginning.

How many countless others from these universities have had their transcripts and qualifications stripped away with no trace and no recourse to recover their official records? Closer to home, what might it be like if academic freedom in the U.S. were to come under such an experience? In the subchapter of Chapter One, The Case for Historical Research, I raised the issue of book banning and the ongoing assault on Critical Race Theory in the U.S.

By the year 2021, 16 states have passed laws prohibiting the teaching of “divisive concepts” which is political ideology that flowed from a Trump administration Executive Order limited the use of federal funds to support diversity and inclusion pedagogical



practices surrounding CRT and gender ideology.<sup>14</sup> Last school year, there were 3,362 cases of school library books being banned or challenged, up from 345 in 2019. Millions of American K-12 students now attend school in districts where their access to books and information is constrained, and where educators face fines or firing for how they teach history or for supporting LGBTQ+ students.<sup>15</sup>

These activities resemble the lead-up to the closing of schools and universities in Türkiye. In Chapter Four I discussed in detail the Academics for Peace petition entitled “We will not be a party to this crime” from January 2016 which resulted in academicians being dismissed and detained. The petition called for the fair treatment of the Kurdish people and demanded an end to ethnic-based violence against them which is not all that different from the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement in the U.S. BLM is a social movement response to systemic racism rampant in the U.S. and is an outward cry for justice among African Americans who have been victimized by white dominance in many aspects of U.S. culture and society.<sup>16</sup> Discussions concerning issues of inequity and injustice are commonplace in academic research especially surrounding correlations to poverty and race contrasted with achievement and opportunity among diverse students.<sup>17</sup> These healthy discussions that can

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<sup>14</sup> Colleen Flaherty, “*Legislating Against Critical Race Theory*,” Inside Higher Education, June 8, 2021, <https://www.insidehighered.com/news/2021/06/09/legislating-against-critical-race-theory-curricular-implications-some-states>.

<sup>15</sup> Kasey Meehan and Tasslyn Magnusson, PhD, and Sabrina Baêta, and Jonathan Friedman, “Banned in the USA: The Mounting Pressure to Censor,” 2023, <https://pen.org/report/book-bans-pressure-to-censor/>.

<sup>16</sup> Dewey M. Clayton, “Black Lives Matter and the Civil Rights Movement: A Comparative Analysis of Two Social Movements in the United States,” *Journal of Black Studies* 49, no. 5 (2018): 448-480.

<sup>17</sup> Django Paris, “Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy: A Needed Change in Stance, Terminology, and Practice,” *Educational researcher* 41, no. 3 (2012): 93-97.

often lead to improvements in pedagogical practice are threatened when academic freedom is squelched. A question for future consideration is to wonder if something similar to what happened with academic freedom in Türkiye is currently happening in the U.S. with the appearance of an inability to reconcile what is taught in the official history textbooks with what may or may not have really happened historically. If Critical Race Theory is eliminated from curriculum where will the counter narrative voices be found? These pillars of historical foundation are paramount to the design of pedagogical practices that are inclusive of past experiences responsive to both the good and the bad practices of the past.

## CHAPTER 8

### EPILOGUE

To be a witness to the experience of Hizmet educators and students through this oral history narrative is an important and sacred opportunity because these perspectives would otherwise go unrecorded. As previously mentioned, these stories represent counter-narratives to the official history of textbooks in Türkiye. In fact, it is likely true that anyone caught referring to the Hizmet people as anything other than terrorists, risks facing charges under Article 301 of the Turkish Penal Code regarding insulting Turkishness.<sup>1</sup> The seismic ripple of the genocide of the Hizmet people has been felt throughout the world, especially in education for higher education faculty, educators and students. By far, what is occurring in Türkiye is not the largest of atrocities occurring around the world, but scale is irrelevant when individual lives are the toll to be paid. And, just as in the name of Mina Leyla's book, *Silent Scream* (mentioned in Chapter Five), if a voice goes un-heard does it exist? Who is listening to the pleas for help, cries, shouts and whispers of the refugee diaspora?

In the U.S., both relocated educators and students have found themselves dealing with the trauma associated with their deeply personal lived experiences of the atrocities affiliated with genocide. Uncovering and illuminating issues surrounding manifestations of refugee trauma highlights the need for sensitivity and preservice preparation in PK-12 classrooms; pre-service preparation for schools of education and foundation courses in higher education both in the U.S. and elsewhere around the globe; pedagogical issues for both immigrant

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<sup>1</sup> Bülent Algan, "The Brand New Version of Article 301 of Turkish Penal Code and the Future of Freedom of Expression Cases in Turkey," *German Law Journal* 9, no. 12 (2019): 2237-2252.

students and citizen students in U.S. classrooms; and silence/censorship that perpetuates racism and disparity in opportunities.

### **Refugee Students in U.S. Classrooms and PK-12 Education Teacher Preparation**

Refugees and asylees are a subgroup of immigrants with special circumstances and needs. Estimates for the first half of 2022 by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) suggest that as many as 112.6 million individuals were forcibly displaced globally. The report also indicated 21,950 refugees departed refugee camps to resettle in the U.S. in 2022 and the number of individuals seeking asylum in the U.S., after fleeing their home countries, was estimated to be as well over 100,000.<sup>2</sup> These numbers are the macro values of large groups of people relocating to new a homeland and seeking empowerment to advocate for self, but these numbers do not tell the story at the micro level of the individuals whose lives have been disrupted. The people who shared their historical narratives in this research, and countless others, are reassembling the pieces and parts of their lives that were lost to the experience of the social genocide of the Hizmet people. Some, due to circumstances, will continue to endure the suffering inside Türkiye. Many others, however, have fled and are now a part of the diaspora seeking refuge and safe harbor throughout the world.

One major hurdle many refugees and asylees often face is barriers to integration resulting from intolerance and discrimination in the host country.<sup>3</sup> An example of such a hurdle, surrounds the issue of Islamophobia or anti-Muslim racism and hostility rampant in

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<sup>2</sup> Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. “UNHCR Global Report 2022,” (Geneva, Switzerland, 2022): 1-200.

<sup>3</sup> Stephanie Berry, Isilay Taban, I., “The Right of Minority-Refugees to Preserve Their Cultural Identity: An Intersectional Analysis.” *Netherlands Quarterly of Human Rights* 39, no. 3 (2021): 198-219.

the U.S. Elfenbein describes this wave of anti-Muslim sentiment as a toxic hysteria that “undermines a shared sense of belonging among American citizens.”<sup>4</sup> For refugees and asylees, the event or series of events that motivated their decision to relocate was involuntary, and by the very definition of their immigration status, the trauma exposure they experienced that prompted the process is of a very serious nature. There is convincing evidence to suggest that refugees have higher rates of mental health issues as a result of the trauma from the experience that prompted the resettlement.<sup>5</sup> A number of studies have identified and supported the presence of unique educational challenges and characteristics of refugee students.<sup>6</sup> A study conducted in Canada identified what researchers termed a “triple trauma” effect observed in children from the experience of refugee resettlement.<sup>7</sup> The first trauma occurred in the precipitating event that caused the migration, the second in the temporary refugee camp, and the third in adjusting to the arrival in the destination host country. At the local level, refugee students require special care and consideration in

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<sup>4</sup> Caleb Iyer Elfenbein, *Fear in Our Hearts: What Islamophobia Tells Us About America* (New York University Press, 2021).

<sup>5</sup> Marija Bogic, Anthony Njoku, and Stefan Priebe, “Long-Term Mental Health of War-Refugees: A Systematic Literature Review,” *BMC International Health and Human Rights* 15, no. 1 (2015): 1-41.

<sup>6</sup> Richard Hamilton, and Dennis Moore, *Educational Interventions for Refugee Children: Theoretical Perspectives and Implementing Best Practice* (Routledge, 2003); Joanne MacNevin, “Learning the Way: Teaching and Learning with and For Youth From Refugee Backgrounds on Prince Edward Island,” *Canadian Journal of Education* 35, no. 3 (2012): 48-63; J. Lynn McBrien, “Educational Needs and Barriers for Refugee Students in the United States: A Review of the Literature,” *Review of Educational Research* 75, no. 3 (2005): 329-364; Jan Stewart, Dania El Chaar, Kari McCluskey, and Kirby Borgardt, “Refugee Student Integration: A focus on Settlement, Education, and Psychosocial Support,” *Journal of Contemporary Issues in Education* 14, no. 1 (2019): 55-70.

<sup>7</sup> Jan Stewart, Dania El Chaar, Kari McCluskey, and Kirby Borgardt, “Refugee Student Integration: A focus on Settlement, Education, and Psychosocial Support,” *Journal of Contemporary Issues in Education* 14, no. 1 (2019): 55-70.

classroom settings. The data suggest trauma-informed curriculum and teacher preparation is essential to integrating culturally responsive pedagogical practice into daily classroom activity in order to meet the needs of the students who are adapting to entirely new culture, language and surroundings.<sup>8</sup>

The first step begins at the institutional level. Districts must be prepared to accept the diversity of cultural norms and behaviors of all students into classroom experiences by adapting policies and procedures that welcome and embrace expressions of difference among students, and actively support administrative and teacher awareness and responsiveness to the unique characteristics refugee students present. Preservice and ongoing teacher preparation and district-wide professional development must include an inclusive trauma-informed and culturally responsive approach to pedagogical practice.<sup>9</sup> This preparation and training must then be integrated into daily practice, not as an afterthought or as an instructional bonus, but as part of the mainstream and daily curriculum. It is my belief that all students should be included in the classroom diversity experience and benefit from this pedagogical practice which should be intentionally designed to integrate and raise cultural awareness as a meaningful part of the curriculum.

One of the unique characteristics and challenges of refugee and asylee students has been studied in the field of psychiatry for more than 40 years. “Idioms of Distress” are what Nichter defined in 1977 as characteristics unique to individuals from differing cultural

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<sup>8</sup> Kavinthan Levi, “Preparing Pre-service Teachers to Support Children with Refugee Experiences,” *Alberta Journal of Educational Research* 65, no. 4 (2019): 285–304.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

backgrounds expressing the behavioral and psychological effects of trauma.<sup>10</sup> Nichter's study "drew attention to the specific words, phrases, and even actions that people use in different cultural contexts to express and respond to distress."<sup>11</sup> What Nichter uncovered and documented was that every culture and sub-culture has within it unique norms and conventions for expressing grief, sadness and other emotions related to trauma. Nichter's work was significant to the point that it was incorporated into the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) and has been widely accepted as a diagnostic tool in the field of psychiatry.<sup>12</sup>

Idioms of distress may be a challenge to recognize in classroom settings, especially if teachers are unprepared or unaware of the many layers of trauma their students have experienced. Teachers typically are not expected to be psychiatrists or trained mental health professionals, and may or may not recognize all of the nuances the distress of refugee and relocation trauma. An innocent example of a classroom exercise that might cause higher levels of distress among students, is interacting in a mixed gender, team-oriented task. While teaming and group learning activities are likely to be common among U.S. students, Islamic children are taught gender separation as part of their cultural norms. It is known as Khalwah (seclusion) and is part of the Sharia which is Islamic religious law, and it requires that interactions with the opposite gender (out of wedlock) should be "public, purposeful and

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<sup>10</sup> Mark Nichter, "Idioms of Distress Revisited," *Cult Med Psychiatry* 34 (2010): 401–416.

<sup>11</sup> Bonnie N. Kaiser, and Leslie Jo Weaver, "Culture-bound Syndromes, Idioms of Distress, and Cultural Concepts of Distress: New Directions for an Old Concept in Psychological Anthropology," *Transcult Psychiatry* 56, no. 4 (2019): 589-598.

<sup>12</sup> American Psychiatric Association. *Desk Reference to the Diagnostic Criteria from DSM-5 (R)*. 2013. Arlington, TX: American Psychiatric Association Publishing.

limited.”<sup>13</sup> So, if a teacher were to design a team assignment and unwittingly mix the gender of the group, it might cause considerable stress if one or more of the team members is Islamic and has been taught to espouse the cultural expectation of gender separation. This could lead to a silencing of the team member who may be afraid to participate in the task which in turn may be misinterpreted by the teacher as an unwillingness to complete the assignment rather than a violation of a cultural norm. This example illustrates how easy it is for misinterpretation to occur when cultural differences and expectations are unknown or unclear. It would be absurd to expect any teacher to understand every cultural difference from around the world, but it is not unreasonable to create opportunities for dialogue and open-minded discourse that leads to better understanding of cultural differences among students. The problem in the U.S. is these refugee students will enter a political milieu that may not be receptive to acknowledging or addressing cultural and ethnic variations in students.

### **Silencing Through Censorship**

Ethnicity and culture are unique characteristics every person is born into. Race, however, is a social construct.<sup>14</sup> Racism is the weaponization of the social construct of race, and the term has now been re-appropriated and been given new nomenclature, “divisive concept.”<sup>15</sup> Recent trends in the U.S. have led to a number of state and local school boards

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<sup>13</sup> “A Quick Guide to Gender Interactions for Young Muslims,” *The Usuli*. April 14, 2019, <https://theusuli.com/2019/04/14/a-quick-guide-to-gender-interactions-in-islam-for-young-muslims/>.

<sup>14</sup> Robin O. Andreasen, “Race: Biological Reality or Social Construct?” *Philosophy of Science* 67 (2000): S653-S666.

<sup>15</sup> Hani Morgan, “Resisting the Movement to Ban Critical Race Theory from Schools,” *The Clearing House: A Journal of Educational Strategies, Issues and Ideas* 95, no. 1 (2022): 35-41.



banning Critical Race Theory (CRT) as if it were an actual subject taught and something that should be banned. CRT is an observable phenomenon of historic, systemic and persistent disparity extant in racially biased legal and educational structures.<sup>16</sup> Under the guise of “divisive concepts,” 44 states have attempted to legislatively ban CRT (as of June 2023) and eliminate classroom discussions of racism and sexism.<sup>17</sup> The ripple impact has led to the introduction of anti-diversity, equity and inclusion legislation in 30 states affecting higher education.<sup>18</sup> If diversity, equity and inclusion are banned from discourse, where and how will someone such as an immigrant fit in to a closed system. I believe this creates a very dangerous and toxic environment in a classroom where we already know the refugee student is vulnerable due to previous trauma. Is the political controversy and the trending legislative limits to academic freedom in the U.S. potentially creating an additional trauma for refugee students and U.S. students? If so, we have an obligation to work as advocates to prevent this from happening.

As I look at what is happening in the United States and what is happening around the world, I believe the common thread is a failure to resolve conflict in way that does not lead to violent outcomes. Since the events of the Holocaust in the 1930s and 1940s, literally millions of people around the world have been impacted by the effects of genocide and crimes against humanity. We live in an age of information at our fingertips, and images of violence raging

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<sup>16</sup> Richard Delgado, and Jean Stefancic, *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction* (New York, NY: New York University Press. 2001).

<sup>17</sup> Sarah Schwartz, “Map: Where Critical Race Theory is Under Attack,” *EducationWeek*. June 13, 2023, <https://www.edweek.org/policy-politics/map-where-critical-race-theory-is-under-attack/2021/06>.

<sup>18</sup> Jessica Bryant and Chloe Appleby, “These States’ Anti-DEI Legislation May Impact Higher Education,” *BestColleges*, June 21, 2023, <https://www.bestcolleges.com/news/anti-dei-legislation-tracker/>.

throughout the world is omnipresent in newsfeeds and social media. Perhaps because the images are so prolific we become desensitized to the suffering, but once the stories are conveyed on a personal level and the individuals become real people to us then they no longer just a number in our newsfeed or social media account. The voices in this oral history are very personal accounts of a problem that impacts millions of people worldwide.

### **The Persistent and Widespread Global Problem of Genocide**

Around the world today, in 2023, there are any number of genocides occurring and several specifically targeting Muslim minorities. In Chapter Two, the Armenian genocide was contextualized in its relationship to the fall of the Ottoman Empire. In Türkiye anyone using the term genocide in association with what happened to the Armenians following World War I is likely to be prosecuted for “insulting Turkishness,” which is a crime punishable by imprisonment of six months to three years.<sup>19</sup> Unlike the United States, freedom of speech is not part of Turkish civil rights. On April 24, 2021, on Armenian Genocide Remembrance Day, U.S. President Biden acknowledged the atrocity and said: “We affirm the history. We do this not to cast blame but to ensure that what happened is never repeated.”<sup>20</sup> It was the first time the U.S. acknowledged that what happened to the Armenians was, indeed, a genocide. It is unfortunate, but President Biden overlooked the fact that millions of people around the world are embroiled in political conflicts wherein the ruling

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<sup>19</sup> Article 301 of the Turkish Penal Code. Bülent Algan, “The Brand New Version of Article 301 of Turkish Penal Code and the Future of Freedom of Expression Cases in Turkey,” *German Law Journal* 9, no. 12 (2019): 2237-2252.

<sup>20</sup> Madeline Roach, “What Biden’s Recognition of Armenian Genocide Means to Armenian Americans,” *Time*, April 27, 2021, <https://time.com/5959135/biden-armenia-genocide/>.

power uses its authority to attempt to extinguish an ethnic minority group. Genocide continues to occur throughout the world.

In 2017 and over the course of three years, the Rohingya of Myanmar, who are predominantly a Muslim ethnic minority in the country left stateless by the 1974 Constitution and Citizenship Act of 1982, have experienced a forced migration as a part of an ethnic cleansing on the part of the State.<sup>21</sup> As a result of their lack of legal status within the country, the Rohingya have experienced military attacks that include beatings, rape, murder and the burning of their villages which has forced more than one million people into refugee camps in Bangladesh.<sup>22</sup> The government of Myanmar denies the existence of the genocide and, despite mounting evidence, the U.S. government and the United Nations thus far has failed to go beyond the designation of “crimes against humanity” to address the issue.

Also, since 2017, more than 11 million Uyghurs living in China have been arbitrarily detained; or, in lieu of detention, they have been subjected “to intense surveillance, religious restrictions, forced labor, and forced sterilizations.”<sup>23</sup> The detentions include what are described as “reeducation camps” in which detainees are forced to pledge loyalty to the Chinese Communist Party, renounce Islam, and learn Mandarin. The United Nations has declared these conditions a genocide. The number of Uyghur refugees worldwide is an

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<sup>21</sup> “Muslims and Rohingya,” Minority Rights Group International. (June 2019), <https://minorityrights.org/minorities/muslims-and-rohingya/>.

<sup>22</sup> Conor Finnegan, “3 Years Later, US Pressed to Declare Rohingya Crisis ‘Genocide,’ Hold Myanmar Accountable,” ABC News. August 25, 2020, <https://abcnews.go.com/Politics/years-us-pressed-declare-rohingya-crisis-genocide-hold/story?id=72522830>.

<sup>23</sup> Lindsay Maizland, “China’s Repression of Uyghurs in Xinjiang,” Council on Foreign Relations, (September 22, 2022), <https://www.cfr.org/background/china-xinjiang-uyghurs-muslims-repression-genocide-human-rights>.

unknown because, similar to what Türkiye has done to the Hizmet people, China expects host countries to return Uyghurs and thus the Uyghurs remain hidden as refugees. The Uyghurs living in Xinjiang, China, are ethnically Turkic Muslims deriving their cultural heritage from the Ottoman period and, in some instances, are able to assimilate into nearby Turkic countries as asylees. According to the Uyghur Human Rights Project, “Uyghur and other Turkic refugees from East Turkistan are living in peril of refoulement because of undue influence from China on governments and immigration authorities in the Uyghur refugees’ host countries.”<sup>24</sup> The Chinese government has made it difficult for the Uyghurs to rehome themselves in the diaspora due to a reasonable fear they could at any time be returned to China by their host country.

As previously mentioned, the Kurdish people not only occupy the southeast region of Türkiye, but also live in Syria, Iran and Iraq. The Kurdish people consider themselves stateless because they are a distinct ethnic culture and do not occupy a single bordered nation. After World War II, national boundaries appear to have been somewhat arbitrarily assigned “with traditional tribal lands extending over multiple borders...”<sup>25</sup> These borders and boundaries produced ethnic conflict for control of territories and governance. The Kurdish people of northern Iraq experienced a genocide following the Iran-Iraq war of the late 1980s. On March 16, 1988, Saddam Hussein released sarin and mustard gas on the town of Halabja killing more than 5,000 people. In total, an estimated 180,000 Kurdish people

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<sup>24</sup> Ben Carrdus, “*I Escaped but not to Freedom: Failure to Protect Uyghur Refugees*,” Uyghur Human Rights Project, (June 20, 2023), <https://uhrp.org/report/i-escaped-but-not-to-freedom-failure-to-protect-uyghur-refugees/>.

<sup>25</sup> Joane Nagel, "The Conditions of Ethnic Separatism: The Kurds in Turkey, Iran, and Iraq," *Ethnicity* VII (1980): 281.

were massacred, and their villages were destroyed in Iraq.<sup>26</sup> As mentioned in Chapter One, the persecution of the Kurdish people as an ethnic minority continues throughout Türkiye. In addition, in Chapter Four, the subject of the Academics for Peace Petition was the just and fair treatment of the Kurdish people in Türkiye and more than 1,100 academicians lost their positions at universities because they signed the petition rendering academic freedom a moot point in Türkiye.

The condition of being stateless or a member of an ethnic minority is very dangerous, and yet arbitrary. There really is no answer to why genocide and crimes against humanity occur on such a widespread scale other than to admit men<sup>27</sup> in positions of power or authority believe that these acts eliminate threats to the maintenance of their leadership status. It is also not uncommon for individuals in these leadership positions to believe that some form of higher power, sometimes referred to as God, has ordained these mass killings and destruction.

In Chapter One, I mentioned my positionality as a Christian woman raised in Roman Catholic education, which stimulated my use of the Hebrew scriptures to provide some of the earliest accounts of what I believe is man's misinterpretation of the voice of God. While I profess to be Christian, the overrepresentation of "man in the coloniality of power, truth, and freedom,"<sup>28</sup> as described by Wynter, represents a tension for me in my contextualization of

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<sup>26</sup> Council on Foreign Relations, <https://www.cfr.org/timeline/kurds-long-struggle-statelessness>.

<sup>27</sup> It is this author's belief that rare is the occasion when a woman commits widespread genocide as a means of maintaining power. Overwhelmingly these military and political moves are orchestrated by men.

<sup>28</sup> Sylvia Wynter, "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation--An Argument," *The New Centennial Review* 3, no. 3 (2003): 257-337.

issues surrounding the abuse of authority and the influence of man's use of violence to resolve conflict. For example, in Deuteronomy 20:16 from the Torah the translated text states: "...in the cities of these peoples that the Lord, your God, is giving you as a heritage, you shall not leave a single soul alive."<sup>29</sup> There is a glaring problem with this text, and I believe this to be the great heresy of sacred scripture. To better understand the problem, we first have to remind ourselves of the story of creation. From the Book of Genesis 1:27 "...and God created the human in God's own image, in the image of God they were created, male and female they were created...and God looked at everything that was made, and found it very good."<sup>30</sup> Later, as Moses led the Israelites through the desert, God spoke to Moses on Mount Sinai and gave us what we now know as the Ten Commandments. The sixth commandment is "Thou shalt not commit murder."<sup>31</sup>

### **The Story of the Midianites**

First and foremost, it is important to note, the Midianites were once allied with Moses and the Israelites. One could say the Midianites were, to some degree, not unlike the Hizmet people in relation to the Erdoğan regime. The story of what ensued is recorded in the Hebrew Book of Numbers, Chapter 31:

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<sup>29</sup> New American Bible Revised Edition translation. In: Hiesberger, Jean Marie, ed. *The Catholic Bible, Personal Study Edition: New American Bible*. Oxford University Press, USA, 2006.

<sup>30</sup> Genesis 1:27 and 1:31. Extracted from three English translations. New American Bible Revised Edition translation. In: Jean Marie Hiesberger, ed. *The Catholic Bible, Personal Study Edition: New American Bible*. Oxford University Press, USA, 2006., *New Revised Standard Bible*, World Bible Publishers, 1989; *The New Jerusalem Bible*, Doubleday and Company, 1985.

<sup>31</sup> Modern day translations of the Ten Commandments say, "you shall not murder." As a part of my Roman Catholic primary school education, I was taught to recite the Ten Commandments from memory at a very early age and Elizabethan English.

And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, “Wreak the vengeance of the Israelites against the Midianites...” And Moses spoke to the people, saying, “Send forth a vanguard of men from you for the army, for them to be against the Midian to exact the Lord’s vengeance... and Moses sent them out... and they killed every male...and they took the Midianite women captive, and their little ones...and all of their cattle and all of their livestock and all of their wealth... and Moses was furious with the commanders... and said to them “You have let every female live!...and now kill every male among the little ones (children) and every woman who has known a man in lying with a male, kill...and all of the little ones of the women who have not known lying with a male, let live...”<sup>32</sup>

The account given in the Book of Numbers is a brutal description of what we would now refer to as a genocide of the Midianite people. It is my belief, the voice Moses hears is not that of God’s but that of Satan, or the serpent that caused humanity’s fall from grace, which leads him to commit the violence and the genocide of the Midianite people.

The Midianite people were just as much a part of God’s creation as were the Israelites. In Genesis 12:1 God says to Abram “go forth from your land and your birthplace and your father’s house to the land I will show you. And I will make you a great nation...” So the story goes that Abram and his nephew, Lot, travel to the land of Canaan and eventually part ways. In Genesis 13 Abram and Lot reencounter each other and “there was strife between the herdsmen...” (Genesis 13:7). There is conflict between the two groups. Abram then meets with Lot and the two negotiate a resolution to the conflict that is agreeable to both sides. So, what does the story of the Midianite people, and Abram and Lot have to do with anything that is happening today? Is it possible to “build a great nation” without having to commit genocide to eliminate political threat by using the model of Abram and Lot?

I asked several of the people I had previously interviewed in this research the following question: “what if Fethullah Gülen and Recep Tayyip Erdoğan were to meet and

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<sup>32</sup> Robert Alter, *The Hebrew Bible: A Translation with Commentary* Vol. 1. WW Norton & Company, 2018.

share a cup of tea and baklava? What would happen if the two men got together and talked it out?” Every single person in the group (even the interpreter) said it was impossible. The responses were emotional, and it seemed as if I had insulted them by asking the question. There were five of us in a group meeting, two participants, an interpreter, the fourth was a man who had just arrived in a host country as a refugee after fleeing Türkiye, and I was the fifth member. After a few minutes I asked them another question, “if the two men never speak, how will they ever resolve this conflict?” The two men have reached an impasse and neither side appears willing to work out a solution. The men in this conversation seemed to believe no potential exists for a solution; it was as if they were on the verge of having lost all hope. However, the one constant that always remains true is that change is inevitable. Something will happen, we may not know what or when, but conditions will change and in the midst of what appears to be utter devastation, the world will continue to turn. Death cannot be the only option for resolving problems. We must find ways to resolve conflict without the use of violence, and this holds true at the personal level, the local level, the national level and the global level.

### **Silence and Voice Empowerment**

This Epilogue is meant to uncover and illuminate manifestations of refugee trauma and calls for sensitivity and preservice preparation in PK-12 classrooms; preparation of teachers and administrators in higher education institutions throughout the world; the development of pedagogical responses to issues for both immigrant and citizen students in U.S. classrooms, and eradicating silence and censorship issues that perpetuate racism and oppression. The story of Abram and Lot sheds light on the possibility of hope. Both Christians and Muslims originate from the Judaic root and Abram is the proverbial father of both faith traditions. By coming together to talk and work out a feasible solution to their



conflict they were able to resolve their problem. As advocates, we must never give up the hope that a solution to the conflict is in the realm of possibility, we must remind ourselves to remain steadfast to the voice of Abram and Lot who modeled successful conflict resolution in ancient times. To this end, voice is the means of breaking the silence and empowering a discourse for advocacy and action.

Voice is “meaning that resides in the individual and enables that individual to participate in a community...”<sup>33</sup> Voice empowerment is the sense that the individual has the power to pursue and express deep passions and interests in such a manner as to be heard.<sup>34</sup> Individuals, refugees, whose native language is not English, may find it quite challenging to use their voices to advocate for entitled services in an Anglophonic dominant relocation destination (e.g., the U.S.). Language acquisition, specifically in curriculum studies, has been the subject of several studies related to success in education.<sup>35</sup> Without a sufficient grasp of the English language, immigrants fail to thrive. The silencing of the voice is the result of a language barrier that prevents them from effectively communicating their story to the new audience in the relocation destination. Yet, the tension in becoming fully assimilated into

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<sup>33</sup> Deborah P. Britzman, “*Practice Makes Practice: A Critical Study of Learning to Teach*,” (SUNY Press 2012): 14.

<sup>34</sup> Peter C. Scales, Peter L. Benson, and Eugene C. Roehlkepartain, "Adolescent Thriving: The Role of Sparks, Relationships, and Empowerment," *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* 40 (2011): 263-277; Yasuko Kanno, and Sara Kangas, “I’m Not Going To Be, Like, For the AP” English Language Learners’ Limited Access to Advanced College-Preparatory Courses in High School,” *American Educational Research Journal* 51, no. 5 (2014): 848-878; Christoph Spörlein, and Cornelia Kristen, “Educational Selectivity and Language Acquisition among Recently Arrived Immigrants,” *International Migration Review* 53, no. 4 (2019): 1148-1170.

<sup>35</sup> Deven Carlson, and Jared E. Knowles, “The Effect of English Language Learner Reclassification on Student ACT Scores, High School Graduation, and Postsecondary Enrollment: Regression Discontinuity Evidence from Wisconsin,” *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management* 35, no. 3 (2016): 559-586.

American culture may present challenges when immigrants attempt to access the cultural capital available to members of the dominant culture.<sup>36</sup> While acculturation, holding on to one's cultural identity and native language, is significant to the immigrant's personal identity; assimilation allows the immigrant to meet the requirements of immigration law and effectively become citizens in the host country.

This historical research offered a platform for voice empowerment to a few of the victims of this social genocide to express their voices and document their first-hand experiences of the torture, imprisonment, and loss they experienced as a result of this injustice. Other silences resonate around the social genocide of the Hizmet people. There may be a number of reasons for a lack of awareness in the U.S. ranging from disinterest and a lack of media coverage, lack of sympathy toward Muslims, to size and magnitude relative to so many other global conflicts currently underway. In addition, the lion's share of U.S. political rhetoric surrounding immigration is typically focused on the southern border and asylum seekers and refugees from Mexico and Central America. It is my belief that silence is the thing that ensures lives do not matter. Every life must matter, and each voice needs to be empowered because once the story is recorded it cannot be un-told; its value cannot be erased from history.

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<sup>36</sup> Scott Davies, and Jessica Rizk, "The Three Generations of Cultural Capital Research: A Narrative Review," *Review of Educational Research* 88, no. 3 (2018): 331-365.

## APPENDIX A:

### TERMS, ABBREVIATIONS AND TURKISH WORDS

Many of the terms in this study have been translated from the Turkish language to English. Often Acronyms do not reflect the English translation of terms. This list is intended to clarify various terms used in the report that include words in Turkish.

**Turkic** vs. **Turkish** – “Turkic” is an ethnic identity and family of languages originating from the same source. The source was a nomadic group dating back an estimated three millennium to the region in south central Asia eventually inhabited by the Ottomans. The Turkic peoples are an ethno-linguistic grouping of population who share ancestry mythology, history and culture and whose reach extends beyond the national borders of Türkiye. “Turkish” refers to both people from Türkiye and the in Turkish or Türkçesi language. <sup>1</sup>

**AKP** - Justice and Development Party, Adalet ve Kalkıma Partisi

**Bir fincan kahvenin kırk yıl hatiri vardır** – a Turkish proverb that means "A cup of Turkish coffee has a forty-year memory" and refers to the act of sitting together in dialogue while sharing coffee or tea and combines the concept with adding an overlay of longevity to the relationship. Forty years represents a lifetime or generation in the Hebrew scriptures.

**Bosporus** or **Bosphorus** – both spellings are the English version of the name of the bridge in Türkiye known as Boğaziçi Köprüsü which has been renamed the Bridge of Martyrs since the events of July 15, 2016.

**Cemaat** – a Turkish word that means “community.”

**CRT** – Critical Race Theory

**Darülfünûn** – the House of Sciences, the first university established by the Ottomans in what became the Republic of Turkey.

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<sup>1</sup> Peter B. Golden, "An Introduction to the History of the Turkic Peoples," *Ethnogenesis and State-Formation in Medieval and Early Modern Eurasia and the Middle East* (1992): 127-136.

**Dershane** – the meeting circles that engage in conversation, inspirational readings, and prayer and provide social spaces for socialization, discussion and networking.<sup>2</sup>

**Diaspora** – people dispersed from their homeland, often not by their own choice.

**FETÖ** – Fethullahçı Terör Örgütü translated from Turkish as Fethullah (Gülen) Terrorist Organization

**Gülen Movement** – (Gülen Hareketi) in Turkish is also known as the Fethullahci

**Hizmet Movement** – used interchangeably with the term Gülen Movement.

**Hizmet** – the term means “service” in Turkish

**Hojaefendi** – the Master, as in a religious leader

**Jihad** – striving or struggling with a praiseworthy aim in Islam. Most often associated with a violent response in the struggle.

**JWF** – Journalists and Writer’s Foundation, Fethullah Gülen, Founder.

**Kemalism** – the philosophy of Mustafa Kemal Ataturk also commonly called Ataturk

**Kurds or Kurdish people** – the fourth largest ethnic group in the Middle East and are from Iran, Iraq, Syria and Türkiye.<sup>3</sup>

**Laicite** – to separate religion and state by political decree.<sup>4</sup>

**Madrassa** – Madrasa refers to a school or college particularly devoted to instruction in Islamic law.<sup>5</sup>

**Madrese-i Yusuf** – means “School of Yusuf” in Turkish. Yusuf is a name commonly translated to Joseph in English from the Hebrew scriptures. In the Qur’an, Joseph is first translated from Hebrew, יוסף, to Arabic, يُوسُفُ, and then into Turkish as Yusuf which is a common name among men in Türkiye. (Google Translate for the Hebrew and Arabic)

**Nurculuk movement** – Muslims who are influenced by the writings of Said Nursi.

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<sup>2</sup> Helen Rose Ebaugh, *The Gülen Movement: A Sociological Analysis of a Civic Movement Rooted in Moderate Islam* (Springer Science & Business Media, 2009), 20.

<sup>3</sup> Callimanopoulos Dominique, “Kurdish Repression in Turkey,” *Cultural Survival*, February 9, 2010, <https://www.culturalsurvival.org/publications/cultural-survival-quarterly/kurdish-repression-turkey>.

<sup>4</sup> Jacob M. Landau, ed. *Atatürk and the Modernization of Turkey* (Brill, 1984).

<sup>5</sup> Burhan Findikli, "A Republic of Scholars or Scholars of the Republic? Reflections on the Predicaments of Academic Freedom and University Autonomy in Turkey," *Higher Education Quarterly* 76, no. 3 (2022): 537-547.

**Pan-Islam** – All Muslims should unify on the basis of a shared identity.

**Tanzimat** – means *reorganization* in Turkish.<sup>6</sup> The Tanzimat Period, 1839-1908, was a time of reorganization within the Ottoman Empire. Mardin discusses “The Tanzimat” as the period from 1839-1876 and describes it as meaning “Turkish Reform Policy.”<sup>7</sup>

**TCK** – Turkish Penal Code

**Tevhid-i Tedrisat Kanunu** – the Law of Unification of Education, 1924<sup>8</sup>

**TMK** – Anti-Terror Law, NR. 3713 Article 7. A complete copy of the Articles 1-25 are included as Appendix C to this document.

**Ummah, Global ummah** – the global community, phonetic pronunciation from Arabic.

**UN** – United Nations

**UNDRIP** – United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People

**WWI** – World War I or the First World War, 1914-1918.

**YKS** - Yükseköğretim Kurumları Sınavı. The exam taken by students seeking admission to universities in Türkiye.

**YÖK** – Council of Higher Education, Yükseköğretim Kurulu.<sup>9</sup> Established in 1981 by Turgut Ozal the then leader of the Turkish Republic.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Google Translate; Turkish to English.

<sup>7</sup> Şerif Mardin, "Center-Periphery Relations: A Key to Turkish Politics?" *Daedalus* 102, no. 1 (1973): 176.

<sup>8</sup> Deniz Kandiyoti, and Zühre Emanet, "Education as Battleground: The Capture of Minds in Turkey," *Globalizations* 14, no. 6 (2017): 870.

<sup>9</sup> Tahir Abbas, and Anja Zalta, "‘You Cannot Talk about Academic Freedom in Such an Oppressive Environment’: Perceptions of the We Will Not Be a Party to This Crime! Petition Signatories," *Turkish Studies* 18, no. 4 (2017).

<sup>10</sup> Gülden Özcan, "Neoliberalism, National Security and Academic Knowledge Production in Turkey," *The University and Social Justice: Struggles Across the Globe*, ed. Aziz Choudry and Salim Vally (Pluto Press, 2020): 60-77.

## APPENDIX B:

### GUIDE TO TURKISH VOCABULARY

When Ataturk codified the Turkish alphabet in 1928 it probably was not as much “fun” as the website portrays it to have been in its “Fun Fact” as shown in Figure B-1.<sup>1</sup>



Turkish is the official language of the Republic of Turkey (as well as Cyprus and Northern Cyprus). There are over 80 million native speakers worldwide! Turkey is a country filled with cultural heritage. In fact, 13 of UNESCO's World Heritage Sites are located there! Santa Clause (Saint Nicholas) and the tulip also came from Turkey. Turkey is also the birthplace of the Turkish alphabet.

#### **HISTORY OF THE TURKISH ALPHABET**

Mustafa Kemal Ataturk is known as the founder of the Turkish republic in 1923. He issued a decree that replaced Arabic script with a version of the Latin alphabet to write Turkish language. (Prior to 1928, Turkish was written using what was known as Ottoman Turkish script - a version based on Arabic script.) Ataturk founded the Turkish Language Association in 1932 as the regulatory body of the Turkish language. They publish the official dictionary, contribute to linguistic research of the language, and also act as the official authority.

Figure B-1: Fun Facts about the history of the Turkish alphabet.

The literary works of writers and poets were rendered indecipherable by later generations when Ataturk's alphabet reform decree to adopt a Roman script as the official Turkish

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<sup>1</sup> Lingualinx, “Fun Facts About the Turkish Alphabet,”  
<https://www.lingualinx.com/blog/fun-facts-about-the-turkish-alphabet>.

alphabet was adopted in 1928.<sup>2</sup> Prior to the adoption of Romanized alphabet, the written language appeared in an Ottoman Turkic script, and by order, the changeover was immediate. The discourse among the learned sounds eerily similar to the contemporary issue in the United States surrounding the obsolescence of cursive handwriting. As it is no longer a part of the elementary curriculum, younger generations will not likely be able to decipher documents written in cursive without specialized training.

The Turkish alphabet contains additional characters not present in English which can be challenging to readers. I found a very helpful bit of information about the Turkish language in the preface of a book by Paul Weller.<sup>3</sup> Below I have taken Weller's example and expanded it based on the incorporation of additional linguistic resources. The purpose is to make the reading of the text a little easier for Anglophonic dominant readers.

Turkish writing contains several letters that are not present in the English alphabet (ö, ü, ğ, ç). These are pronounced as follows:<sup>4</sup>

**Ç, ç** "ch" as in "chime"

**Ğ, ğ** – "Yumuşak ge" (Ğ ğ) or "soft g" for example always follows a vowel and is pronounced in one of two ways. If the vowel before it is one of a, ı, o, u then "yumuşak ge" will lengthen the sound of that vowel, eg. yağmur, ağaç. If the vowel is one of e, i, ö, ü then "yumuşak ge" will be pronounced as "y", eg. eğitim, iğne. Since "yumuşak ge" always follows a vowel there are no words that start with it.<sup>5</sup>

ğ lengthens the sound of the vowel that appears before it; except that when it appears between two vowels, it is not pronounced.

**İ, ı** – the I without the dot. The sound of "uh" as in fuss or plus

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<sup>2</sup> Laurent Mignon, "The Literati and the Letters: A Few Words on the Turkish Alphabet Reform," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 20, no. 1 (2010): 11-24.

<sup>3</sup> Paul Weller, *Hizmet in Transitions: European Developments of a Turkish Muslim-Inspired Movement*. Springer Nature (2022): xv.

<sup>4</sup> For this guide, I combined information from Weller's book, and the Turkey Travel Planner, Tom Brosnahan, "Turkey Travel Planner," <https://turkeytravelplanner.com/details/LanguageGuide/Pronunciation.html>.

<sup>5</sup> Turkishbasics, <https://turkishbasics.com/grammar/alphabet.php>.

İ, i – the İ with a dot on the top sounds like “tea” or a long e

Ö, ö – same as the sound of “u” in “Turkey”

Ş, ş – sh” as in “shoot”

Ü, ü – “u” as in “tube”



## APPENDIX C:

EYYUP ESEN, PhD, TURKISH LANGUAGE INTERPRETER

### CURRICULUM VITAE

#### EYYUP ESEN. PhD

Kansas City | (785) 979-1307 | eyyupesen@gmail.com

#### EDUCATION

University of Kansas   PhD in Higher Education	2009 - 2014
Park University   MA in Communication and Leadership	2016 - 2019
University of Cincinnati   MA in Educational Studies, Peace Education Certificate	2007 - 2009
Black Sea Technical University   BA in Turkish Language	2002 - 2006

#### DISSERTATION

Going & Coming: Why U.S. Educated Turkish PhD Holders Stay in the U.S. or Return to Turkey?

#### PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

Metropolitan Community College Educational Opportunity Center, Academic Advisor	Kansas City 2022-Present
Wichita State University College Access Advisor	Topeka, KS 2018-2022
St .Paul School of Theology, Leading a retreat and a practicum Raindrop Foundation	2022 Kansas City, KS
Diversity and Inclusion Coordinator <i>Advisor &amp; Recruiter</i>	2014 – present
OPT and Outreach Coordinator, Dialogue Institute	Kansas City, KS 2014 – present
Outreach Coordinator, University of Kansas Turkish Instructor	Lawrence, KS 2009 - 2015
<i>President of Dialog Student Association</i>	
<i>President of Study Turkish Student Organization</i>	
Department of Corrections <i>Volunteer</i>	Leavenworth, KS 2009
Horizon Science Academy Charter School Tutor	Cleveland, OH 2008 – 2009
Mars Private Education Center Teaching Assistantship	Istanbul, Turkey 2006 - 2007

## CONFERENCES

The MO-KAN-NE 41<sup>st</sup> Annual Conference, The relationship between Gear UP programs and their influence on students going to college, April 3, 2019

United Nations, Commission on the Status of Women | Entrepreneurship Program for Economic Empowerment of Women Reentrants, March 19, 2019

Spring Research Conference | A Comparative Study on the Influence of Turkish and American Public and Private High Schools on their Graduates' Academic Achievement at College, April 3, 2009

Southern Conference on African American Studies, Inc. | Education and Slavery of Blacks in Spanish Florida and New Orleans, February 12 -13, 2009

## PUBLICATIONS & PROCEEDINGS

*Foods* | Motivations for Food Consumption during Specific Eating Occasions in Turkey, 2016

Chanadang, S., Phan, U.T.X., Chambers, D., and Esen, E. 2016. Motivation of everyday food choices: Differences between American and Turkish respondents. In: *Proceedings SPISE 2016: From Product Formulation to Consumer Experience*, ed. Nguyen, Valentin, Le, Lam, Chollet, & Abdi, Vietnam National University - HoChiMinh City Publishing House. pp 63-73.

*Journal of Education, Policy, Planning, and Administration* | Financial Aid and Student Persistence: A Review and Analysis of the Literature, 2013

*Journal of Higher Education* | Book Review / Campus Life, 2013

*Human Architecture: Journal of the Sociology of Self-Knowledge* | Academic Achievement of Turkish and American Students, 2010

*Civil Academy: Journal of Social Sciences* | The Slavery & Education of Blacks in Spanish Florida and New Orleans, 2009

*International Higher Education Congress: New Trends and Issue* | A Comparative Study on Predicting Turkish and American High School Graduate's Academic Achievement at College, Bosphorus University, 2012

*International Congress of Educational Research* | The Effect of Home Environment on Academic Achievement of Students, 2012

*International Higher Education Congress: New Trends and Issues* | Effects of Social & Cultural Capital on College Student: The Case of First-Generation College Students in Turkey, 2011

## Books

Global Warming of Hearts

I am not Color Blind

Dictatorial Dietary Style versus Democratic Dietary Style

Escaped from Turkey (editor)

#### **AWARDS / HONORS**

- Legend of Diversity Award by Wyandotte County Ethnic Festival, 2017
- The Table of Faiths Award by Greater Kansas City Interfaith Council, 2017
- Clark Coan International Student Award, University of Kansas, 2015
- Full Scholarship by Bosphorus Education Institute, 2009-2014
- Travel Award for an International Conference on Comparative Education in Istanbul Turkey by University of Kansas, 2012
- \$750 A Comparative Study on the Influence of Turkish and American Public and Private High Schools on their Graduates' Academic Achievement at College Spring Research Conference, 2009
- University Graduate Scholarship for M.A. by University of Cincinnati, 2007 – 2009
- Presidential scholarship granted by ministry of Turkey 2002 – 2006

#### **Board Affiliations:**

Board Member Advocates of Silenced Turkey  
Board Member L'Arche Heartland

#### **RECOGNITIONS**

Organized a great number of Annual Dialog and Friendship Dinners, panel discussions, lecture series, Turkey trips, receptions that brought together thousands of people including mayor, city manager, state representatives, faith leaders, attorneys, and people from all walks of the life. My contributions to Dialog and Peace in the State of Kansas & Missouri & Turkey have been recognized by Kansas & Turkish media, churches and others.

Fox 4 Kansas City  
Kansas City Live  
Leavenworth Times  
AOL  
A Haber Web TV

Lawrence Journal World  
KSHB Kansas City  
Kansas City Star  
Caryn Mirriam-Goldberg

Flatland KC  
Carolyn's Various Travels  
Unity of Lawrence

APPENDIX D:

HAFZA GIRDAP ON WANTED LIST IN TÜRKİYE

**Liste- (FETÖ/PYD Terör Örgütü) HAKKINDA-TURKIYEDE-BULUNAN-MALVARLIGININ DONDURULMASI-KARARI ALINAN KISILER**  
**Translation: List- (FETO/PDY Terrorist Organization) PEOPLE IN TURKEY FOR WHICH A DECISION WAS MADE TO HAVE THEIR ASSETS FROZEN**

Sıra No	TCKN	Ad-Soyad	Anne Adı	Baba Adı	Doğum Tarihi	Doğum Yeri	Karar Tarihi Sayı	Resmî Gazete
384	52099031908	HAFZA GIRDAP	Sultan	Zakariye	25.09.1979	Kadıköy	2012.2021/2021/5	24.12.2021-31699

Order Number	ID Number	Name and Surname	Mother Name	Father Name	Date of Birth	Place of Birth	Decision Date Number	Official Newspaper

Hafza's name appeared on line 384 of the list. This is one of the lists that indicates she has a warrant for her arrest. The other names on the list were removed for the privacy of the individuals listed.

## APPENDIX E:

### ANTI-TERROR LAW NR. 3713

#### ANTI-TERROR LAW NR. 3713

(Amended with the Law Nr. 5532 Regarding Amendment in the Anti-Terror Law)

##### ARTICLE 1- DEFINITION OF TERROR

“Terrorism is any kind of act attempted by one or more persons belonging to an organization with the aim of changing the characteristics of the Republic as specified in the Constitution, its political, legal, social, secular and economic system, damaging the indivisible unity of the State with its territory and nation, endangering the existence of the Turkish State and Republic, weakening or destroying or seizing the authority of the State, eliminating fundamental rights and freedoms, or damaging the internal and external security of the State, public order or general health by using pressure, force and violence with one of the methods such as terror, intimidation, oppression or threat.”

##### ARTICLE 2- TERRORIST OFFENDER

Whoever becomes a member of the organizations consisted in direction towards objectives prescribed in the Article 1 and commits a crime together with the others or alone for these purposes or even not commit the intended crime but being a member of organizations shall be deemed as terror offender.

The ones who are not even a member of terrorist organization but committed a crime on behalf of the organization shall be deemed as terrorist offender and punished as the members of organizations.

##### ARTICLE 3- TERRORIST CRIMES

Felonies envisaged in the Articles 302, 307, 309, 311, 312, 313, 314, 315, 320 and 310 of the Turkish Penal Law Nr. 5237 of 26.09.2004, are of terrorist crimes.

##### ARTICLE 4- FELONIES COMMITTED WITH THE PURPOSE OF TERROR

Whenever below given felonies are committed in the context of activities of a terrorist organization, founded in order to commit crime in direction towards purposes, indicated in the Article 1, shall be deemed terrorist crime:

- a) felonies indicated in the Articles 79, 80, 81, 82, 84, 86, 87, 96, 106, 107, 108, 109, 112, 113, 114, 115, 116, 117, 118, 142, 148, 149, 151, 152, 170, 172, 173, 174, 185, 188, 199, 200, 202, 204, 210, 213, 214, 215, 223, 224, 243, 244, 265, 294, 300, 316, 317, 318, 319, and 2nd paragraph of the Article 310;
- b) felonies defined in the Law on Fired Arms and Knives, and Other Instruments Nr. 6136 of 10.07.1953;
- c) felonies of intentionally burning forest, defined in the 4th and 5th paragraphs of the Article 110 of the Law on Forests Nr. 6831 of 31.08.1956;
- c) felonies defined in the Anti-Smuggling Law Nr. 4926 of 10.07.2003 and necessitating imprisonment;
- d) felonies in relation to acts causing proclamation of State of Emergency in those regions, where the State of Emergency was proclaimed as per the Article 120 of the Constitution;
- e) felonies defined in the Article 68 of the Law on Protection of Cultural and Natural Heritage Nr. 2863 of 21.07.1983.”

##### ARTICLE 5- INCREASE OF SENTENCES

Confinements and judicial fines to be determined according to related laws against those persons committed felonies prescribed in the Articles 3 and 4 shall be adjudged by increasing them one half. In penalties to be determined in this way, the maximum limit of a penalty determined either for a specific criminal act or for every kind of penalty may be exceeded. However, instead of life imprisonment, heavy life imprisonment shall be adjudged.

If any increase is envisaged for the penalty in the related Article due to fact that the felony was committed in the context of the activity of an organization, then an increase shall be made in penalty according to only this Article. However, increase to be made shall not be less than 2/3 of the penalty.”

#### **ARTICLE 6- DISCLOSURE AND PUBLICATION**

Those who announce that the crimes of a terrorist organization are aimed at certain persons, whether or not such persons are named, or who disclose or publish the identity of officials on anti-terrorist duties, or who identify such persons as targets shall be punished by imprisonment for 1 to 3 years.

Those who print or publish leaflets and declarations of terrorist organizations shall be punished by imprisonment for 1 to 3 years.

Those who, in contravention of Article 14 of this law, disclose or publish the identity of informants shall be punished by imprisonment for 1 to 3 years.

In case of criminal acts prescribed in above paragraphs, and committed through media, a judicial fine for one thousand to ten thousand days shall be adjudged for owners and persons in charge of publication, who have no any accessorship in committing the felony by the media. However, the maximum limit of this penalty for persons in charge of the publication shall be five thousand days.

Periodicals including publicly provocation for committing felony, glorification of felonies committed and their authors, and propaganda of a terrorist organization in the context of activities of a terrorist organization may be, as a measure, held up on the ground of Order of a Judge, or of Warrant of a Public Prosecutor for fifteen days to one month, where any delay would cause adverse consequences. If Judge doesn't approve such a Warrant in course of 48 hours, then it shall be deemed null and void.”

#### **ARTICLE 7- TERRORIST ORGANIZATIONS**

Whoever founds, leads a terrorist organization, and becomes member of such an organization, with purpose to commit crime, in direction towards objectives prescribed in the Article 1, through methods of pressure, threatening, intimidation, suppression, and menace, by taking advantage of force and violence, shall be punished according to the provisions of the Article 314 of the Turkish Penal Law. Whoever arranges activities of the organization shall be punished as leader of the organization.

Whoever makes propaganda of the terrorist organization shall be punished by imprisonment for one to five years. In case of committing this crime through media, penalty to be given shall be increased by one half. In addition, a judicial fine for one thousand to ten thousand days shall be adjudged for owners and persons in charge of publication, who have no any accessorship in committing the felony by the media. However, the maximum limit of this penalty for persons in charge of the publication shall be five thousand days. Below given acts and behaviors shall be punished according to provisions of this paragraph as well:

- a) fully or partially to veil face with the purpose to hide personal identity in course of convention and demonstration march, turned into a propaganda of terrorist organization;
- b) to carry emblem and signs, shout slogans or announce through audio means, which would show membership or supportership of the terrorist organization, or to wear uniforms with emblem and signs of the terrorist organization.

If offences prescribed in the second paragraph are committed inside any block, local, bureau or outlying buildings belonging to associations, foundations, political parties, labour and trade unions or their subsidiaries, or inside educational institutions or student hostels or their outlying buildings, then punishment envisaged in this paragraph shall be doubled.”

#### **ARTICLE 8- FINANCING OF TERROR**

Whoever knowingly and willfully provides with or collects fund for committing partially or fully terrorist crimes, shall be punished as a member of an organization.

Fund cited in the first paragraph of this Article shall mean money or all types of property, right, credit, revenue and interest, value of which may be presented by money, and benefit and value that was collected as a result of conversion thereof.

#### **ARTICLE 8/A-QUALIFIED ACT**

If crimes included in this Law are committed through undue influence in the public service, punishment to be given shall be increased by one half.

#### **ARTICLE 8/B- RESPONSIBILITY OF LEGAL PERSONS**

If crimes included in this Law are committed in the context of a legal personality, security measures peculiar to those persons as per the Article 60 of the Turkish Penal Law shall be adjudged.

### **PART TWO CRIMINAL PROCEDURE**

#### **ARTICLE 9- DETERMINATION OF FUNCTION AND JURISDICTION**

Trials regarding crimes included in this Law shall be held by high criminal courts, prescribed in the first paragraph of the Article 250 of the Criminal Procedure Law Nr. 5271 of 04.12.2004. Lawsuit files initiated for these crimes against children older than fifteen years shall be handled by these courts as well.

#### **ARTICLE 10- INVESTIGATION AND PROSECUTION PROCEDURE**

Regarding the offences included in this Law, the other provisions shall be applied to the matters where there is no provision in the articles 250-252 of Criminal Procedure Law. However;

- a) If there existing a risk in view of the purpose of the investigation, on the ground of warrant of Public Prosecutor, a relative of the person apprehended or detained or whose detention period was prolonged shall be informed.
- b) Suspect may take advantage of judicial assistance only of one attorney in course of detention. The right of suspect under detention to meet the attorney may be restricted on the ground of the order of judge for 24 hours upon the request of public prosecutor, however, no statement shall be taken in course of this period.
- c) In course of taking statement of the suspect by law enforcement officers only one attorney may be present.
- d) Only employment record number shall be written down instead of personal identification of related officials in the minutes to be issued by law enforcement officers.
- e) If there exists risk for the purpose of investigation in course of examination and taking copies of the content of the file by attorney, such a competency may be restricted on the ground of order to be issued by judge, upon the request of public prosecutor.
- f) In course of investigation undertaken due to crimes prescribed in this Law, documents, files of the attorney regarding the defence and minutes of dialogues of attorney with suspect under arrest shall not subject to examination. However, if there have been some diagnosis or materials as to the fact that attorney appears to be a mediator for communication of members of terrorist organization in line with organization's objectives, upon the request of public prosecutor and on the ground of the order of judge, either an official may be instructed to attend the meeting and materials to be submitted by suspect to attorney or by attorney to suspect may be examined by judge. Judge may decide fully

conviction.

Terror offenders, whose death penalty have been converted into lifelong heavy imprisonment on the basis of the Law Nr. 4771 on Amendment in Various Laws of 03.08.2002 amended by the Article 1 of the Law Nr. 5218 of 14.07.2004, and terror offenders, whose death penalties have been converted into heavy life imprisonment and or who were sentenced to heavy life imprisonment shall not take advantage of conditional release. Heavy life imprisonment shall continue till their death.”

**ARTICLE 18-CONSTRUCTION OF PRISONS AND DETENTION CENTERS**  
(Abolished: 18/07/2006-art. 5532/17)

**PART FOUR**  
**MISCELLANEOUS PROVISIONS**

**ARTICLE 19- REWARDS**

Provided that there was no accompliceship, whoever assists to detain perpetrators of crimes included in this Law or denounces their whereabouts or personal identification shall be awarded by cash prize. Amount, procedures and conditions of the prize shall be determined by regulation to be issued by the Ministry of Interior.”

**ARTICLE 20- MEASURES OF PROTECTION**

The State shall take necessary protective measures regarding judicial, of intelligence service, administrative and military officials, who assigned task or accomplished such a task, law enforcement officers, Director General and Deputy Directors General of Prisons and Detention Houses, public prosecutors and prison wardens of prisons and detention houses, where terror offenders were protected, judges and public prosecutors, served at the State Security Courts, judges and public prosecutors undertaking service at high criminal courts, authorized by the Article 250 of the Criminal Procedure Law, and those, who have already left their service, and persons having become or having been made as public target of terror organizations, and persons, who assisted to disclose crimes.

Request for protection and security of chairing judges and members of high criminal courts to be nominated by High Commission for Judges and Public Prosecutors as per the Article 250 of the Criminal Procedure Law, and of public prosecutors in charge of investigation and criminal proceedings for crimes included in the jurisdiction of these courts, shall be primarily and urgently satisfied by related authorities and instances. Means and materials needed for protection shall be provided with by the Ministries of Justice and Interior.

Arrangements shall be undertaken in such subject matters, namely as protective measures, as modification of physiological appearance through aesthetic operation, if any request is made, modification of birth registration, driving licences, marriage certificate, diploma, and such documents, arrangement of military procedures, protection of rights regarding properties in kind of securities and real estate, social security and other rights. Of retired personnel being under protection, those with compulsory in-house protection shall be given advantage of lodgment by Ministry served, or public institution and organization, through hire value to be determined by taking into consideration by the Ministry of Finance of current rental values. In course of implementation of those measures the Ministry of Interior and related other institutions and organizations shall be obliged to comply with the rule of strict secrecy.

Conditions and procedures regarding protective measures shall be determined by a regulation to be issued by the Prime Ministry.



Of above-cited personnel, public officials, even though they have already left their service, shall be authorized to use arms in order to ward off any attacks to be directed by terror offenders towards themselves or their spouses and children.”

#### **ARTICLE 21- PENSION FOR INVALIDS AND SUPPORT FOR WIDOWS AND ORPHANS**

Where an official is injured, left disabled, dies or is killed as a result of being exposed to terrorist activities in the course of his duty at home or abroad, even if he has subsequently left service, the provisions of Law 2330 on Monetary Compensation and Pension shall be applied. In addition:

(a) The total of the pension for invalids, or the spouse and orphans of those killed and entitled to a pension, may not be less than the pension of their colleagues on duty; if pensioners are killed by reason of terror, the monthly payment for their spouse and orphans may not be less than their monthly pension according to the relevant law. Insolvents that cannot perpetuate their life and depending support of anybody and spouses, orphans of those killed shall be paid post-retirement gratuity at an amount of the highest government salary. The others shall be paid at existing salaries as they worked for 30 years. In case of deficiency the difference shall be paid by the social security institutions and reimbursed by the Treasury.

(b) Those left invalid while benefiting from public accommodation at home or abroad, and the spouse and orphans of those killed and entitled to a pension (except those living in houses specially provided under the Law of Public Housing, shall continue to benefit from public accommodation for one year. Those who after that year leave such public housing and those not benefiting from public accommodation and those living in specially provided houses shall on application be paid rent by the State for accommodation within the country for a period of 10 years. Those living in specially provided accommodation abroad shall on application be paid the rent payable abroad for one year by the State.

(c) As regards benefiting from accommodation loans, the provisions of additional Article 9 of Law 2559 on the Duties and Competence of the Police shall be applied; those provisions shall also be applicable to invalids or their spouses and, where their partners are not alive or have re-married, to their children.

(d) Invalids, spouses, the daughters who do not work under social security organizations except Pension Fund of the Republic of Turkey and not get paid and the invalid sons who cannot perpetuate their life by working, minor children and mothers, fathers of those killed shall be entitled to travel free of charge on State Railroads, City Maritime Lines and on public transport. If the spouses or orphans cease to be entitled to a pension under the provisions of the laws on social security, they shall not be entitled to any of the rights provided in this Article.

e) Victims, and widows and orphans of those died shall be examined and cured at all hospitals belonging to public institutions and organizations, where they would submit their recognition cards, issued by the Pension Fund of the Republic of Turkey. All treatment expenditures thereof shall be met by the related social security institution, if related persons have been working at any public institution or organization or have been taking pension of victims, old-age assistance, or salary for widow and orphan – by the related social security institution, and if there is no any salary for victims or widows or orphans, then by the Ministry of National Defense or the Ministry of Interior. Absent organs of disabled persons shall be accomplished by available artificial ones, fabricated either at home or abroad through most modern techniques, and if any need, such artificial organs shall be repaired or renewed.

f) The ones who cannot be cured in inland shall be cured in abroad based on the reports of the authorized medical institutions.

g) Insolvents who cannot perpetuate their life and orphans shall be sheltered and took care without any payment or State paid in the hostels or asylums belonging to public bodies and establishments, in case of not existing of these bodies, in the private rehabilitation centers and welfare centers.

h) The soldiers, subject to the provisions of Law Nr. 2330 on Monetary Compensation and Pension dated 03.11.1980, injured or left disabled as a result of being exposed to terrorist activities in the course of his duty shall benefit from the rights prescribed in the above sub-paragraphs (d), (e), (f) and (g); the spouses and the daughters who do not work under social security organizations except Pension Fund of the Republic of Turkey and not get paid and the invalid sons who cannot perpetuate their life by working, minor children and mothers, fathers of killed soldiers shall benefit for the rights prescribed in above sub-paragraph (d).

i) University students and children of died persons, whose villages were evacuated due to anti-terror struggle, shall be granted complimentary scholarship for their higher education by the State

#### **ARTICLE 22- SUPPORT FOR OTHER PEOPLE SUFFERING LOSSES FROM TERRORISM**

Citizens who are not civil servants, but suffer from terrorist activities with loss of life or property shall get special support from the Social Welfare and Solidarity Fund. The scope and amount of the support will be determined by the local authorities administering the Fund.

#### **ADDITIONAL ARTICLE 1-**

A) General, annexed and special budget institutions and establishments, local administrations, all sorts of enterprises or subsidiaries whose half of the capital publicly owned are obliged to allocate 0.5 % of their staff cadres subject to Law Nr. 657 Regarding State Personnel and contractual personnel and permanent workers to the persons stated below owing to the terrorist acts written in the article 1 of this law and employ or assign the persons determined in accordance with the provisions of this paragraph;

a) Public officials martyred or disabled to work and soldiers' spouses if any, or one of the children, or one of the sister/brother

Or,

b) Disabled but able to work

The Ministry of Interior is charged to determine the persons in the scope of the above paragraph and inform the public institutions and establishments having convenient cadres for the assignment of the ones who want to work considering their qualifications and the requirements of the job. It is not necessary to get permission for assignment of these people. However, the concerning persons should have the qualifications and properties which the job and cadre requires excluding the examination.

The procedure and principles followed up for the employment of the martyred relatives and the disabled ones who are able to work shall be determined with a regulation which will be issued by Ministry of Interior in three months by taking the advices of Ministries of Finance, National Defense, Labour and Social Security, State Personnel Presidency and Employment Agency.

B) Owing to the terrorist acts written in the article 1 of this law; the employers, in case of any request, are obliged to employ;

- a) Public officials martyred or disabled to work and soldiers' spouses if any, or one of the children, or one of the sister/brother or,
- b) soldiers disabled but able to work,

in the permanent workers status in the businesses where they are employing 50 or more workers as a ratio of 2 % (total number of workers shall be taken into consideration for the ones who have more than one business in the same province).

In determination of the number of these persons which will be worked, the number of permanent workers is taken into account. In calculating the 2%, fractions up to half are not considered. They are increased to whole.

The employers or their proxies who act contrary to the provisions of this paragraph shall be punished to fine ten times of the minimum wage determined for that year for each of the person they are not worked and each month.

The procedure and principles followed up for the employment of the martyred relatives and the disabled ones who are able to work shall be determined with a regulation which will be issued by Ministry of Labour and Social Security in three months by taking the advices of Ministries of National Defence and Interior. The employer finds the concerning persons through Employment Agency.

#### **ADDITIONAL ARTICLE 2-**

In case of non-obedience to the order of "give up!" in course of operations to be undertaken against terror organizations, or of any initiatives to use arms, law enforcement officers shall be authorized directly and immediately to use arms on the objective, to the extent and proportion so that they could neutralize the risk

### **PART FIVE TEMPORARY PROVISIONS**

#### **TEMPORARY ARTICLE 1-**

In connection with crimes committed until 8 April 1991:

- a) Death sentences shall not be executed. Convicts covered by this provision shall be required to serve 10 years of the sentences provided for in Article 19 of Law 647 on the Execution of Sentences.
- b) Convicts sentenced to life imprisonment shall have to serve 8 years of their sentences.
- c) All others sentenced to punishments restricting personal liberty will have to serve one fifth of their sentences.

After serving the abovementioned terms they shall be conditionally released regardless of good conduct and without having to apply for such release.

The time spent in pre-trial detention shall be included in calculating the abovementioned periods.

The provisions relating to reduction of sentences in additional Article 2 of Law 647 on the Execution of Sentences shall not be applied to such convicts.

#### TEMPORARY ARTICLE 2-

In connection with suspects held in pre-trial detention for alleged crimes committed until 8 April 1991, the minimum limits of the expected sentence provided in the relevant law shall be considered:

(a) at the stage of preparatory investigations, according to the nature of the crime taken as the basis of the indictment;

(b) at the stage of final investigations, according to the crime mentioned in the indictment or according to the changed nature of the crime;

and if the pre-trial detainee has been imprisoned for a period specified in temporary Article 1, the detainee shall be released within 30 days of this law entering into force,

1) before a public case was started by the prosecution;

2) if a public case is continuing by the competent court;

3) if a case is pending at the appeal or military appeal court [after being referred there] by the competent court or the chief prosecutor. Defendants awaiting a public case or against whom a public case was started earlier shall be tried.

In case the defendant does not appear in court, the testimonies made to the prosecutor or before a judge shall be taken as sufficient. Following a final verdict at the end of the trial, the provisions of conditional release according to temporary Article 1 of this Law shall be applied.

#### TEMPORARY ARTICLE 3-

Those who, following the publication of this law, are entitled to benefit from the provisions of temporary Article 1, but have received disciplinary punishment on account of acts prejudicial to prison discipline, shall not benefit from the provisions of temporary Article 1 until their disciplinary punishment is lifted according to the Statute on Administration of Penal Institutions and the Execution of Sentences.

#### TEMPORARY ARTICLE 4-

Those who until 8 April 1991:

(a) killed or attempted to kill civil servants or officials on duty by acts defined in this law as terrorist acts, even if they have subsequently abandoned their status [sic], and those who participated in such offences;

(b) committed offences under Articles 125, 146 (except the last paragraph), 403, 404(1), 405, 406, 407, 414, 416 (1) and 418 of the Turkish Penal Code,

(c) violated provisions of the third chapter in Part Two of the Turkish Penal Code, entitled "Crimes against the Administration of the State", or, in contravention of the Banking Law, unjustly and irregularly received moneys from banks, or, in violation of Law 1918 on the Prevention and Prosecution of Smuggling, obtained an advantage, or conducted irregular, fraudulent or fictitious transactions of export, import or investment incentives and by doing so obtained unjust deduction of taxes, premiums, loans, difference of interest or similar advantages from public sources and those participating in such offences, regardless of whether or not the time limit for prosecution against such offence has passed, unless they have repaid the unjust and irregular advantage obtained by them,

(d) committed offences under Articles 55, 56, 57, 58 and 59 of the Military Criminal Code, shall not benefit from the provisions of Temporary Article 1. However, death penalties imposed for offences mentioned in

this Article shall not be executed.

Such convicts shall be released conditionally regardless of good conduct and without the need for a special application, as follows: after 20 years if they were sentenced to death; after 15 years if they were sentenced to life imprisonment; and after they have served one third of their sentences in all other cases.

The time spent in pre-trial detention shall be included in calculating the abovementioned periods.

The reducing provisions of Additional Article 2 of Law 647 on the Execution of Sentences shall not be applied to such convicts.

The provisions of Temporary Article 2 (except for the reference in the last paragraph to Temporary Article (1) and Article 3 of this Law shall also be applied to such convicts.

#### **TEMPORARY ARTICLE 5-**

In order that those who, according to chapter (g) of Article 25 of Law 403 on Turkish Citizenship, have lost their Turkish citizenship can benefit from the temporary provisions of this Law, there shall be no condition imposed on their re-entry into the country within two years from the coming into force of this law and such persons shall not be stopped at the border when re-entering.

#### **TEMPORARY ARTICLE 6-**

Until special facilities for penal institutions have been built, pre-trial detainees and those convicted of terrorist crimes shall be kept in other penal institutions.

#### **TEMPORARY ARTICLE 7-**

The provisions of Article 17 of this law shall be applied to those who commit crimes under this law after it has entered into force.

#### **TEMPORARY ARTICLE 8-**

The provisions of Article 21 of this law shall be applied from the beginning of the first day of the month following the entering into force of the law for all persons included in this law since 1 January 1968.

#### **TEMPORARY ARTICLE 9-**

(Revoked: 31/03/1992-E.1991/18, 1992/20)

#### **TEMPORARY ARTICLE 10-**

Before this Law came into force, for the offences in the scope of article 8 of Law Nr. 3717 abolished with this Law,

- 1- Nolle prosequi is given by Public Prosecutors' Office in the pre-trial proceedings carried out.
- 2- -
  - a) The arrested defendants shall be released by Public Prosecutors' Office if there is no public prosecution brought on them,
  - b) The arrested defendants shall be released by the concerning courts if there is a public prosecution brought on them,

APPENDIX F:  
PERMISSIONS GRANTED FOR USE

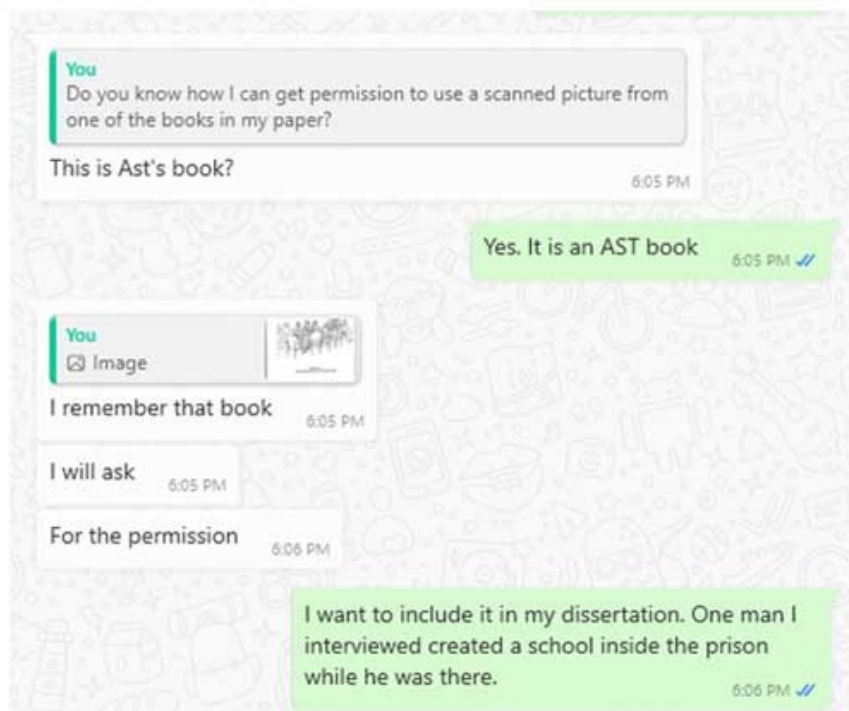
**Permission to Use Yolgezer’s Drawing From AST Book**

Aslihan, a volunteer from Advocates of Silenced Turkey (AST), secured permission for the use of the sketch by the artist from the book entitled: *A Picture is Worth a Thousand Words: The Illustrations of a Teacher in Prison*, by Yolgezer. The drawing is included as Figure 4-4 in the text of Chapter 4.




**Aslihan Abla AST**

For your security, chat history isn't transferred to new linked devices.



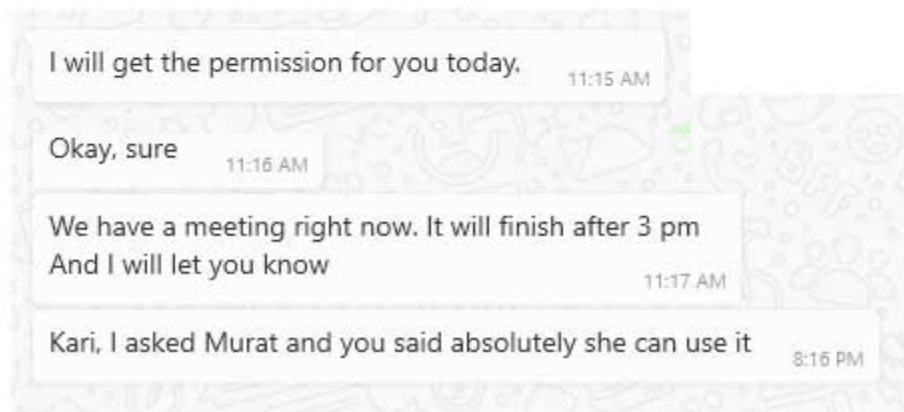


## Aslihan Abla AST

 For your security, chat history isn't transferred to new linked devices.

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2 Unread Messages



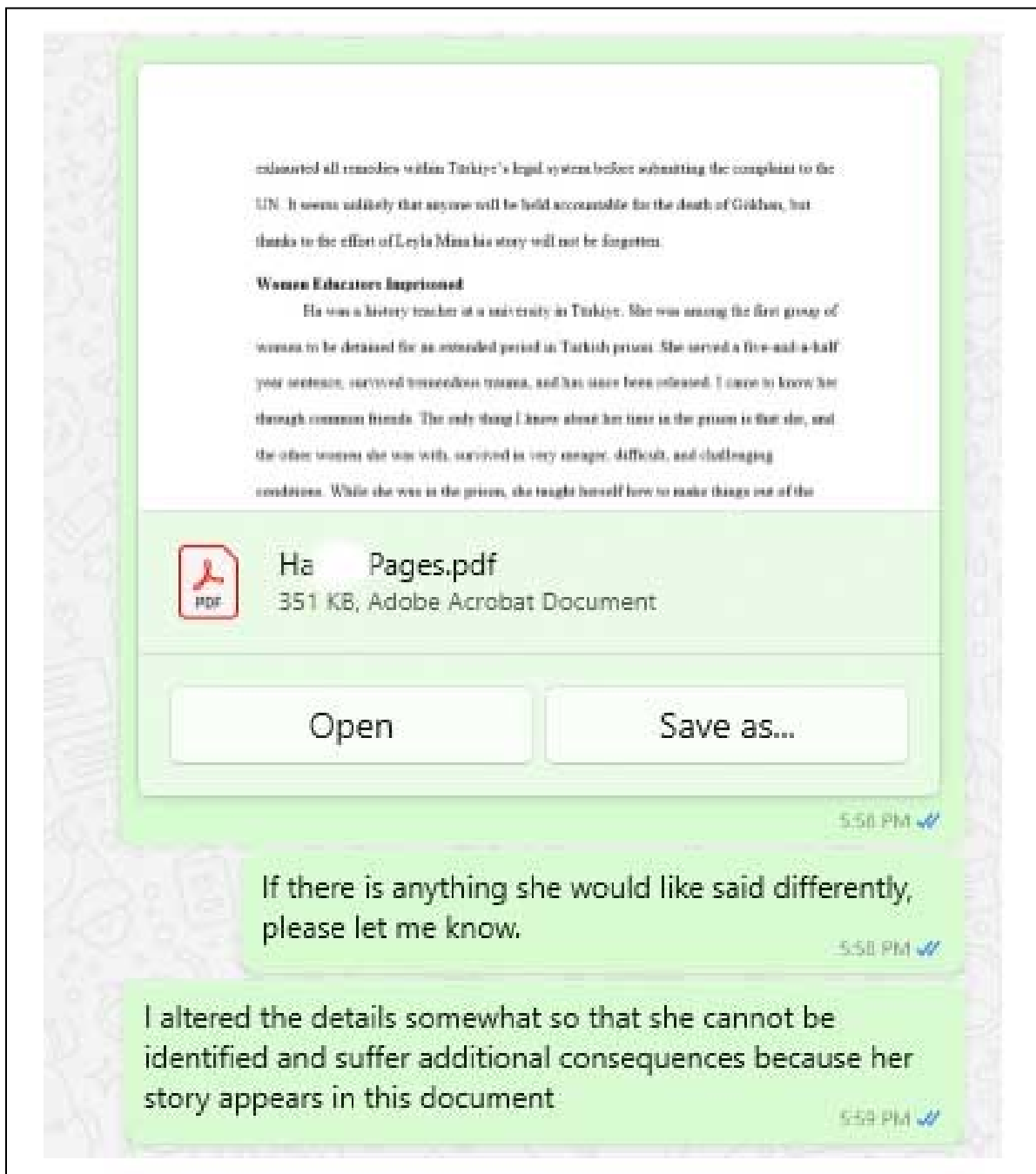
Aslihan asked Murat Kaval, the President of AST, for the permission to reprint the sketch by Yolgezer and permission was granted.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Yolgezer, *A Picture is Worth a Thousand Words: The Illustrations of a Teacher in Prison* (AST Publishing, 2021).

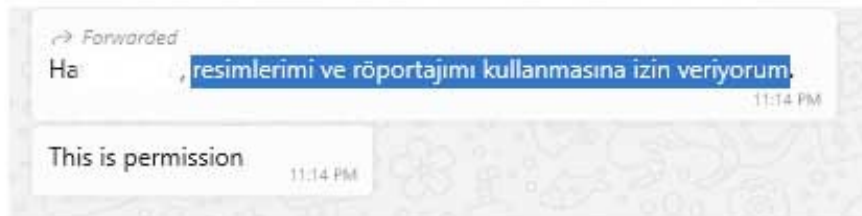
## Permission to Use Ha's Story and Social Media Images

I contacted Ha through our mutual friend and sent her a copy of the text to be included in the research. The PDF file included the images used as figures in the document. Our mutual friend translated the document via a WhatsApp phone session to ensure Ha understood fully what was reported in the text. Ha's only comment was that since our interview, she has returned as a student to university and is taking classes in professional jewelry design so that she may pursue a new career path.





Ha sent the following text in Turkish: “resimlerimi ve anlatmamı kullanmama izin veriyorum” which translated to English means “I give permission to use my pictures and description.”



## APPENDIX G:

### PARTIAL LIST OF HIZMET EDUCATORS ABDUCTED OR MISSING

This list is identified as “partial” because the list may be incomplete, and it is believed the abductions have continued to occur after this data was published by Advocates of Silenced Turkey (AST). Hafza Girdap, Executive Director of AST said: “These are the ones we know about.”

Name and Profession	Date and Place of Disappearance or Arrest	Incident/ Current Status	Details
Sunay Elmas Educator	27-Jan-2016 Turkey-Ankara	Enforced Disappearance Missing	Sunay Elmas is the first person ever recorded to have been abducted for alleged ties with the Gülen movement. He was a victim of the enforced disappearance even before the failed coup on July 15, 2016, at the Ankara CEPA shopping mall while he was returning from dropping his kids at home in Sincan district. Elmas had also been forced into a Volkswagon Transporter with tinted windows. His family has not heard from Elmas since then.
Alaettin Duman Educator	13-Oct-16 Malaysia	Arbitrary arrest and detention Sentenced to 18 years	Kidnapped on his way to a mosque by Malaysian police, Duman was deported to Turkey illegally. He was tortured severely both in Malaysia and Turkey. Duman had been teaching in Malaysia for 10 years before he was abducted and was one of the founders of Time International School. Erdoğan’s media had accused him of being the point man of the Gülen movement in Malaysia. Duman was sentenced to 18 years on April 17, 2018.
Uğur Toksoy Educator	31-Mar-2017 Kosovo	Abduction Asylee in Kosovo	Toksoy, a Turkish teacher at the Gülen-affiliated Hasan Nahi school in Prizren and head of the Atmosfera Association in Kosovo, was among the people sought by the police for deportation. But he was fortunate to evade extradition since the police were unable to find him that day. Toksoy applied for asylum on November 3, 2017, which was approved on April 6, 2018.

Cihan Özkan Educator	31-Mar-2017 Kosovo	Rendition Sentenced to 7.5 years	Cihan Ozkan was a teacher at the Orizont school in Kosovo. He was among the 6 people who were illegally abducted by the Kosovar intelligence forces and deported to Turkey illegally. Özkan was arrested in Turkey and a court sentenced him to seven years and six months in November 2019.
Hasan Hüseyin Günakan Educator	31-Mar-2017 Kosovo	Rendition Sentenced to 8 years and one month	Hasan Hüseyin Günakan was one of the six Turkish nationals who were deported from Kosovo to Turkey on March 29, 2018. He was a teacher. A Turkish court sentenced him to eight years and one month.
Kahraman Demirez Educator	31-Mar-2017 Kosovo	Rendition Sentenced to 8 years and one month	Kahraman Demirez, the principal of Mehmet Akif College in Gjakova, was abducted illegally in a joint operation by the Kosovar and Turkish intel agencies. He was one of the six educators deported to Turkey despite the concerns of unfair trial and inhumane treatment. He was sentenced to eight years, nine months imprisonment on December 26, 2019.
Mustafa Erdem Educator	31-Mar-2017 Kosovo	Rendition Jailed pending trial	Mustafa Erdem was not among the first wave of detainments by the Kosovo intelligence, but he was also included in the list while he was trying to get information into what exactly was happening and to help his friends. He was sent to Turkey with the rest and has been waiting for a court decision behind bars since then.
Yusuf Karabina Educator	31-Mar-2017 Kosovo	Rendition Jailed pending trial	Yusuf Karabina, the Vice Director of the Gülistan Educational Institutions, his wife Yasemin Karabina and their 15-year-old son were stopped by Kosovo police in plainclothes on the morning of March 31, 2017. The Kosovan officers used violence to force them into the cars and reportedly continued beating them during their detention in the station. Karabina was sent to Turkey unlawfully, and there he was put in jail. He is still pending trial.

Turgut Çapan University Director	31-Mar-2017 Turkey-Ankara	Enforced Disappearance  Missing	Turgut Çapan was abducted on March 31, 2017, in Ankara. His wife Ülkü Çapan released a video clip in which she said Önder Asan, a friend of her husband's, dropped by her home to inform her of Turgut's abduction. Asan was also abducted on the same day.
Önder Asan Educator	31-Mar-2017 Turkey-Ankara	Enforced Disappearance  Turned over to police after torture. Jailed pending trial.	Önder Asan was found 42 days after his sudden disappearance in Ankara, with severe torture signs on his body. He was psychologically devastated. His wife Fatma filed petitions with police and the prosecutor to investigate possible kidnapping but had no progress. His lawyer Burak Çolak was detained after refusing to sign a false statement saying Asan hadn't seen any violence and that he was absent on his own will.
Cengiz Usta Educator	4-Apr-2017 Turkey-İzmir	Enforced Disappearance  Returned home safe.	Cengiz Usta was a teacher at the Cumhuriyet Primary School in Torbalı district of Turkey's İzmir province. He was dismissed from his job by the government on September 1, 2016. He was abducted by two men after leaving home to pay for the elevator maintenance fee. He reappeared in Afyon on July 10, 2017, saying he left home on his own accord because he was depressed.
Turgay Karaman Educator	2-May-2017 Malaysia	Abduction  Jailed pending trial	Turgay Karaman was the principal of the Gülen movement-affiliated Time International School. On 2 May 2017, he was kidnapped in Malaysia. CCTV footage revealed that he was forced into a car by five unidentified persons in an underground parking garage. His family quickly discovered that he could not be reached, and they alerted the local police and the UN office in Kuala Lumpur. Karaman was deported to Turkey, where he was arrested.

İsmet Özçelik Academician	4-May-2017 Malaysia	Rendition Jailed pending trial	Awaiting resettlement by UNHCR after having previously been the victim of an attempted abduction from his son's home in Kuala Lumpur, İsmet Özçelik was kidnapped by Malaysian security officers. The local police intervened and stopped the rendition. He was detained for a period of 50 days before Malaysian authorities decided to release him pending trial. On 4 May 2017, he was once again deprived of his liberty. On 12 May 2017, he was sent to Turkey although he had a pending extradition hearing and no judicial decision to that effect had been taken. Upon return to Turkey, he was held in incommunicado detention at an unknown location and was later arrested.
Fatih Kılıç Educator	14-May-2017 Turkey-Ankara	Enforced Disappearance Missing	Dismissed from his teaching job under the post-coup emergency rule, Kılıç was abducted on May 14, 2017. There has been no sign of him since the last CCTV footage he appeared in shows him getting into a vehicle found in the Ankara's Kızılay district. Both the police and the prosecution ignored the family's insistent requests for a detailed investigation to find Kılıç. He is still missing.
Mustafa Emre Çabuk Educator	25-May-2017 Georgia	Rendition	Mustafa Emre Çabuk had a valid Georgian residence permit and was working as a teacher when he was detained by the Georgian security forces and later arrested by a Georgian court upon a request from the Turkish government. The incident created a big outcry in the country as well as a reaction from international human rights organizations. He was released after 9 months.
Zabit Kişi Educator	16-Sep-2017 Kazakhstan	Abduction Jailed pending trial	Zabit Kişi was abducted from a plane by a group of unknown people in the Kazakh city of Almaty. Kişi was accused of having links with the Gülen movement. He was tortured for 108 days by MİT agents in a secluded place and was later turned over to the police. Kılıç was sent behind the bars by a court, which refused to do anything about the torturers.

Enver Kılıç Educator	16-Sep-2017 Kazakhstan- Almaty	Abduction  Jailed pending trial	Enver Kılıç was the other person, alongside Zabit Kişi, who was abducted from a plane by a group of unknown people in the Kazakh city of Almaty. Enver Kılıç reappeared on 11 April 2018; however, UN's Committee on Enforced Disappearances noted that Kılıç was also tortured during 73 days of detention in an unknown place. His health was in a bad condition.
Mesut Kaçmaz Educator	27-Sep-2017 Pakistan	Abduction  Released pending trial	Mesut Kaçmaz, his wife Meral and daughters Huda Nur and Fatma Huma, were abducted forcefully in the middle of the night from their home and were later deported to Turkey. Mesut and Meral were arrested, while the teenage daughters were turned over to a relative. The two persons were released in the first hearing.
Meral Kaçmaz Educator	27-Sep-2017 Pakistan	Abduction  Released pending trial	Mesut Kaçmaz, his wife Meral and daughters Huda Nur and Fatma Huma, were abducted forcefully in the middle of the night from their home and were later deported to Turkey. Mesut and Meral were arrested, while the teenage daughters were turned over to a relative. The two persons were released in the first hearing.
Aslan Çelik Superintendent	19-Jan-2018 Iraq	Abduction  Rescued	Arslan Çelik was the superintendent of the Roonaki Salahaddin Ayyubi Colleges. He was abducted on January 19, 2018, on his way to the school by a group of armed men who forcefully seized him on Kurdsat Avenue in Sulaymaniyah, Iraqi-Kurdistan. The country's late president Jalal Talabany's wife, Hero, stepped in and saved Çelik, who was later sent to Dubai under the protection of Hero and from there to the United States.
Ayhan Seferoğlu Educator	19-Feb-2018 Azerbaijan	Rendition  Jailed pending trial	Ayhan Seferoğlu was detained by Azeri police and was kept in jail for 40 days before a court released him. His relatives were waiting outside to meet him, but he was abducted by unidentified persons from the backdoor of the courthouse. Seferoğlu's wife called on the Azeri authorities to help find her husband. He was brought to Ankara and was arrested for being a member of a terror organization.

Ayten Öztürk Student	8-Mar-2018 Lebanon	Rendition Jailed pending trial	Ayten Öztürk was abducted in the Lebanon airport on March 8, 2018, delivered to the Turkish intelligence units on March 13, 2018, and subjected to severe torture for six months. Öztürk had been living in Syria since she was wanted in Turkey for being a member of the outlawed Revolutionary People's Liberation Party/Front (DHKP-C) and had moved to Lebanon to migrate from there to Europe after the conditions had aggravated in Syria.
Osman Özpınar Educator	15-Mar-2018 Gabon	Rendition Jailed pending trial	Gabon authorities rounded up the principal of the Ecole la Lumière School, Osman Özpınar, on March 15, 2018, for forgery of official documents. This was proven wrong by the defendant, but instead of releasing him, the Gabon authorities detained him again, this time on the grounds that he was a threat to national security. He was deported to Turkey, where he was arrested on terror charges.
İbrahim Akbaş Educator	15-Mar-2018 Gabon	Rendition Jailed pending trial	Gabon authorities detained İbrahim Akbaş, the director of pedagogy of the Lumiere School, along with his spouse Fikriye, who was the accountant at the same school, on March 15, 2018. They were first charged with forgery of official documents. But when they were acquitted from this charge, the Gabon authorities detained them again, this time on the grounds that they constituted a threat to national security. They were deported to Turkey. İsa was arrested, while Fikriye was released.
Fikriye Akbaş Educator	15-Mar-2018 Gabon	Rendition Jailed pending trial	Gabon authorities detained İbrahim Akbaş, the director of pedagogy of the Lumiere School, along with his spouse Fikriye, who was the accountant at the same school, on March 15, 2018. They were first charged with forgery of official documents. But when they were acquitted from this charge, the Gabon authorities detained them again, this time on the grounds that they constituted a threat to national security. They were deported to Turkey. İsa was arrested, while Fikriye was released.

Adnan Demirönel Educator	22-Mar-2018 Gabon	Rendition Jailed pending trial	Adnan Demirönel was detained in Gabon for his alleged links with the Gülen movement and was deported to Turkey. He was charged with being the “imam,” or the point man for the African country. He refused the assertions, saying he wasn’t involved in any activity other than teaching.
Hasan Kala Academician	21-Jul-2018 Turkey-Ankara	Enforced Disappearance Missing	Associated Professor Kala was abducted after being forced into a black Transporter in Ankara’s Batıkent district at 11:30 p.m. on July 21, 2018.
Veysel Akçay Educator	27-Jul-2018 Mongolia	Abduction Rescued	Veysel Akçay was forcefully captured in his home by a group of five masked men, possibly Turkish spies, and he was bundled into a van to be illegally abducted to Turkey. A Turkish army aircraft was waiting to transport him. But after his family and friends mobilized a reaction online and informed Mongolian authorities about the incident, the aircraft was forced to land and Akçay was saved.
Ahmet Bilgi Educator	6-Sep-2018 Moldova	Rendition Jailed pending trial	Ahmet Bilgi was one of the six Turkish nationals seized by the Moldovan authorities in 2018. He was deported to Turkey like the rest and was arrested after the first hearing.
Feridun Tüfekçi Educator	6-Sep-2018 Moldova	Rendition Jailed pending trial	Feridun Tüfekçi was the director of the branch of the Orizont school in the city of Ceadîr-Lunga. Having come to the country at the age of 17 to study, he later became a permanent resident after marrying his teacher, Galina. Tüfekçi also worked as a journalist for sometime, representing a Turkish TV channel in Moldova. He was deported to Turkey.
Hasan Karacaoğlu Educator	6-Sep-2018 Moldova	Rendition Sentenced to 8 years and 3 months.	Hasan Karacaoğlu was in Moldova for over 20 years by the time he was abducted in 2018. During all his time at the Orizont schools in Moldova, he was helping Moldovan youth prepare for their lives. He was the deputy director by the time he was expelled from the country for no reason.



Rıza Doğan Educator	6-Sep-2018 Moldova	Rendition Jailed pending trial	Rıza Doğan had established a life in Moldova for over 20 years. He married there and both of his daughters were born in the country. He also was running a company of his own, paying taxes and was an integrated part of Moldova. He was sentenced to 7.5 years in prison by a Turkish court on July 19, 2019.
Hüseyin Bayraktar Educator	6-Sep-2018 Moldova	Abduction Jailed pending trial	He was snatched by the MİT from the front of the school he was working at. Hüseyin Bayraktar had only spent three years in Moldova, teaching Turkish language.
Mujdat Celebi Educator	6-Sep-2018 Moldova	Abduction Jailed pending trial	Müjdat Çelebi had been residing in Moldova for five years. He was the financial director of the company that manages the Orizont high schools in Moldova.
Ahmet Ertürk Educator	16-Nov-2018 Turkey-Ankara	Enforced Disappearance Found	Ahmet Ertürk, a teacher at a school run by the Gülen movement, was abducted on Nov. 16, 2018. After his abduction, his parents' home was raided by the police. He reappeared in Ankara Police Department on January 8, 2019.
Mehmet Gelen Educator	30-Dec-2018 Azerbaijan	Arrested and deported Jailed pending trial	Mehmet Gelen, a Turkish schoolteacher in Azerbaijan, was abducted by Turkish intelligence agents after he was interrogated by an Azerbaijani prosecutor over allegations of his links with the Hizmet movement. Gelen was taken to Turkey within hours.
Özgür Kaya Educator	12-Feb-2019 Turkey-Ankara	Enforced Disappearance Jailed pending trial	Özgür Kaya was abducted in the same incident as Yasin Ugan. Like Ugan, he was also returned to the Ankara police on July 26, 2019. He was charged with terror organization membership and was put in jail on August 10, 2019.
Erkan Irmak Educator	16-Feb-2019 Turkey-İstanbul	Enforced Disappearance Jailed pending trial	Erkan Irmak was kidnapped in front of his house in İstanbul on the night of Feb. 16, 2019, and his family has been unable to reach him since. On July 26, 2019, he appeared in police custody and was arrested as part of an investigation into the Gülen movement. He was later arrested and sent to the prison on August 10, 2019.

Arif Komis Educator	30 Aug 2019 Malaysia	Rendition Jailed pending trial	The police from the Malaysian Immigration Bureau detained Arif Komis, his wife and four children. Komis, the director and a teacher at Hibiscus International School, had applied for asylum and was under UN protection. Malaysia surrendered the teacher to Turkey, ignoring reactions against this decision in the international and domestic circles.
Osman Karaca Educator	19-Oct-2019 Mexico	Rendition Jailed pending trial	Karaca was arrested by the Mexican police and was turned into the Turkish intelligence agents, according to the state-run news agency Anatolia. Karaca worked at the Zaman International School for nearly 9 years. His extradition drew ire from human rights associations in Mexico.
Gülistan Doku Student	5-Jan-2020 Turkey	Disappearance Missing	Gülistan Doku, a student of Munzur University in Turkey's eastern province of Dersim, went missing on January 5, 2020. While search efforts continued for some time in the Uzunçayır Dam, where she was seen for the last time, these efforts were also ended as of August 18. Considering that the teams came across no trace of Doku, it has been confirmed that she is not in the water. There is also still no detention warrant against Zenal Abarakov, the chief suspect in the investigation file.
Ugurcan Bayna S.B. Ali Berke Aydugan Students	18-Feb-2021 Turkey-Ankara	Missing Delivered	Three university students in the capital Ankara were kidnapped on Feb. 18 afternoon by people who described themselves as the police. The students were later in the day released, after their lawyer notified of their kidnapping to the Ankara Police headquarters. The students held a press conference regarding the incident, saying the kidnapers had carried out criminal record checks (GBT) on them.
Selahaddin Gulen Educator	3-May-2021 Kenya	Missing Arrested	Turkish spies kidnapped in Kenya the nephew of Fethullah Gülen, Erdogan's arch enemy Turkish authorities accuse Selahaddin Gülen of belonging to the preacher's movement whom the president accuses of having engineered a coup attempt in July 2016

<p>Orhan Inandi</p> <p>former director of school</p>	<p>1-Jun-2021</p> <p>Kyrgyzstan</p>	<p>Missing for 7 months</p> <p>Sentenced to 21 years in prison</p>	<p>Educator Orhan İnandi, founder and director of the Sapat school network in Kyrgyzstan, went missing after leaving his house in Bishkek on Monday evening, the TR7/24 news website reported. He was last contacted by a friend at around 9 p.m. Attempts by his family to contact him all failed. He is feared to have been abducted by Turkey’s National Intelligence Organization (MİT) due to his alleged links to the Gülen movement, according to his family.</p>
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Data extracted from: “Global Purge: 144 Abductions Conducted by the Turkish Government in Turkey and Abroad.” Advocates of Silenced Turkey Publishing (2021)

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## VITA

Kari Lynn O'Rourke was born September 3, 1961, in Kansas City, Missouri. She attended Roman Catholic elementary and high schools through the completion of her junior year at which time she joined the United States Navy. She spent five years in the Navy during which time she completed two years of undergraduate coursework. After her Honorable Discharge from the Navy in 1983, she completed her undergraduate coursework in Psychology from Saint Mary College in Leavenworth, Kansas and graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree in 1985.

Ms. O'Rourke entered the Missionary Sisters of the Holy Rosary and served a year of mission work on the west side of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. She returned to Kansas City and later became a member of the Catholic Worker community where she and the other members of the community provided hospitality and meals to guests living in a concentrated high poverty and crime area of the city. She later volunteered in missions in Appalachia and Mexico. She has served on numerous local and national boards and committees with an orientation toward outreach to underserved individuals and groups.

Ms. O'Rourke completed her Masters of Business Administration at the Bloch School of Business, University of Missouri, Kansas City, in 1998. Shortly thereafter she became a mother to adopted twins and dedicated herself to raising "the boys." As her children aged and required less of her attention, she reentered the workforce and became a technology funding consultant and specialized in assisting schools serving student enrollments in underserved and underfunded communities. In the Fall of 2010, she returned to the University of Missouri, Kansas City, to pursue an interdisciplinary Ph.D., in Educational Leadership, Policy and Foundations, and Curriculum and Instruction.