

## Article

# Moving beyond Binary Discourses: Islamic Universalism from an Islamic Revivalist Movement's Point of View

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**Abstract:** The resurgence of religion worldwide proved that secularization is not a de facto reality of modernity and the initial chaos that came along with the birth of postmodernity evolved into uniquely developing combinations that recognized cosmopolitan, multicultural, and hybrid (i.e., fluid and hyphenated) identities. Universal values became more instrumental than ever to connect members of hyper diverse societies while ethnocentric, nativist and exclusivist patriotism expired (and only recently starting to attract far right and white supremacist groups alone). Most Islamic revivalist movements emerging from this context have had minimal interactions with non-Muslims and influence on mainstream societies. Being in search of a solution to respond to the overwhelming effects of the West on Muslim societies, these revivalist movements could not change (and maybe contributed to) the binary positioning of Islam and the West. On the contrary, the Hizmet movement, inspired by Muhammed Fethullah Gülen and his predecessor Bediuzzaman Said Nursi, appeared in the global arena as an Islamic revivalist movement whose discourse resonated with the commonly shared universal values of every culture, ethnicity, and religion. The Hizmet movement did not position itself as an antithesis to Westernization, secularism, and modernity; the movement adopted a universalist and all-inclusive attitude, which re-introduced to the world that Islam is universal religion with the capacity to accommodate people of diversity and meet the needs of every age. This paper explores the Hizmet movement's historical, theological, and social roots as a transnational Islamic revivalist movement. It analyzes the movement's outreach across multicultural societies and its capability to adapt to a changing world through its educational and interfaith and intercultural activities across the globe. While unpacking thirty years of the Hizmet movement's activities and the contribution to the literature, the paper also addresses some of the criticisms that have emerged regarding the movement and its activities, particularly in the wake of the 2016 failed coup attempt in Turkey. It should be noted that much criticism toward the movement emerged in recent years, and the movement did not face much backlash in its early years of development. With this in mind, this paper explores the development of the Hizmet movement and how much of its initiatives rapidly left a positive mark on diverse societies around the world. The paper is thus structured chronologically, tracing the birth, growth, stagnation, and transition (or according to some collapse) of the movement. The paper, by extension, too, positions the Hizmet movement within the phenomenon of contemporary Islamic revivalism as this movement is born out of similar conditions as are other Islamic revivalist movements but taking a slightly different direction, which is that it challenges the prevailing binary 'us and them' discourses produced mostly in ethno-centric political discourses.

**Keywords:** Hizmet; Fethullah Gülen; Said Nursi; revivalism; modernity; revivalist movements; education; interfaith dialogue; intercultural dialogue; Islamic movements; multiculturalism; cosmopolitanism



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## 1. Introduction

Islamic revivalism is a concept borrowed from a *sahih hadith* (authentic Prophetic Tradition) that promises the revival of the Muslim community every hundred years through a 'reviver' of the religion (Sunan Abi Dawud 4291, Book 38, Hadith 4278). This *hadith*

encouraged charismatic religious leadership to counter the pressuring socio-political as well as spiritual crises of Muslim societies, especially in the turn of the twentieth century. During this time, Muslim nations witnessed the collapse of the Ottoman empire, the abolishment of the Caliphate, the rise of nation-states based on the notion of nationalism, western modernity, and secularization. Islamic revivalists during this time wanted Islam to be the social and global order.

Revivalist movements are characterized by a shared basis of three central elements: the need to return to the Qur'an and the *sunnah* (the prophetic way) set by the Prophet; and a reaffirmation of authenticity (Hirschler 2005). Yet, each of these three central elements are subject to contending theories influenced by local traditions, cultural, socio-political, and economic conditions, as well as differing levels of human reasoning which may affect Islamic understanding and practice (Esposito 2005). Even so, all revivalist movements aimed to rejuvenate the Islamic community by referring to Islam. Revivalists also strongly rejected orientalist judgements that degraded Islam and its representation while recognizing the shortfalls of Islamic societies; they suggested a flexible and adaptable Islam that complied with the needs of modern times (Esposito 2005). Some early Muslim revivalists included Shah Wali Allah of Delhi (1702–1762), Muhammad bin Abd Al-Wahhab (1703–1793), Sayyid Ahmad Barelewi (1786–1831), and Mahdi Sudani (1844–1885).

Much like early revivalists, Islamic modernists rose to respond to the cultural and political waves of Western colonialism and imperialism. Islamic modernists attempted to “form modernity in Islamic terms” rather than turning back to the past in nostalgia, asserting that there was no clash between Islam and modernity because Islam, originally, appealed to rationality and reason (Lapidus 1997). While they believed in the necessity of reinterpretation and reform, their goal was to provide “a parallel response to the deeper forces transforming the world order in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries” (Lapidus 1997, p. 455). They stressed Islam's capacity to adopt modernity without much difficulty, particularly as Islam itself has once managed a growing civilization for some centuries prior to Western development and influence (Esposito 2005). Some notable Islamic modernists included Muhammad Abduh (1849–1905), Rashid Rida (1865–1935), and Muhammad Iqbal (1877–1938).

There is a third, politically motivated, strand that has gained momentum with the Iranian Islamic revolution of 1979. The onset of this revolution in 1979 saw an immediate rise in Islamic insurgencies across the Middle East. For example, the seizure of the Grand Mosques in Saudi Arabia in 1979, the assassination of Anwar Sedat in Egypt in 1981, the Hama Uprising in Syria in 1982, and the 1983 United States suicide bombing in Beirut, Lebanon. These insurgencies desired to fix the failure of secular governments by strengthening Islamic influence in political, economic, and social life (Momayezi 1997). Their motives also included opposition to Western influence, imperialism, and intervention, much like Islamic modernists, however, their defensive reactions to modernity (Esposito 1999) were in response to the belief that there is no need to import Western beliefs and values found within modernity; Islamic thought is self-sufficient and has the capability to create a modern pattern for Muslim societies, including Muslim minorities living in the West (Esposito 2005). Within this strand, only a few tended toward radicalism (Esposito 1999), whereas the majority adhere to a more purified Islam seeking “purification from foreign accretions and the securing of a political authority in an attempt to form an Ummah (Muslim community)” (Ali 2012, p. 61).

Despite Islam being the main drive for all, revivalist movements are molded by local and/or national circumstances. For instance, Esposito notes that these movements emerge in countries where modernization has been the strongest; the most powerful manifestation of Islamic resurgence has occurred in more ‘modernized’ secular Muslim countries, such as in Egypt, Iran, Lebanon, and Algeria (Esposito 1999). In contrast, the revivalists of ethno-religiously diverse societies such as Indonesia opted for collaboration rather than confrontation with the government. While *Muhammadiyah* (founded by KH Ahmad Dahlan in 1912) appeared to be a modernist movement promoting education, *Nahdlatul Ulama*

(founded by Hasyim Asy'ari in 1926) developed a traditional path in response to their modernist tendencies. Likewise, pro-Islamic rulers in Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore negotiated with the Islamic revivalists which eventually gave Muslims the confidence to live with and reconcile their customary, ethnic (later national) and religious identities in multicultural societies (Mutalib 1998; Khalil and Haddad 1995). In countries such as Thailand, the Philippines and Myanmar, where Muslims are a minority and where religious intolerance by the state and aggressive tendencies by Islamic revivalists are present, tensions and conflict abound (Mutalib 1998).

Besides socio-political revivalist movements, a few movements have focused on reviving Islamic spirituality through traditional Islamic education for decades. For instance, the Deoband Movement founded in India in 1867 by Muhammad Qasim Nanautavi and Rashid Ahmad Gangohi, which committed to spreading *Darul Ulum madrasas* (Islamic schools) that provided purely religious education centers worldwide. They held public morality by classical Islamic education and knowledge (Ingram 2018). Maulana Muhammad Ilyas (coming from the Deoband stream) founded the *Tabligi Jamaat* in Mewat India in 1927—an apolitical movement whose priority was to teach Islam and renew one's commitment to the religion (Ali 2003). Sufi movements managed to survive in the revivalism era without altering Sufi customs. However, all these movements that prioritized the revival of Islamic knowledge and spirituality merely targeted Muslim populations. Even while spreading their message in the Muslim minority countries, they had minimal interaction with non-Muslims and minimal influence on mainstream societies. Furthermore, being in search of a solution to respond to the overwhelming effects of the West on Muslim societies, most of these revivalist movements inevitably reproduced the binary positioning of Islam and the West.

However, resurgence of religion worldwide proved that secularization is not a de facto reality of modernity (i.e., desecularization), the close interaction of the global with the local in the age of interconnectedness gave rise to glocalization (Karpov 2010). Western societies accommodating second, and third generations migrants also rhetorically moved away from ethnocentrism to multiculturalism. The initial chaos that came along with the birth of postmodernity evolved into uniquely meaningful combinations that recognized cosmopolitan, multicultural, and hybrid (i.e., fluid and hyphenated) identities. Universal values have become more instrumental than ever to connect members of hyper diverse societies while ethnocentric, nativist and exclusivist patriotism expired (only just recently attracting far right and white supremacist groups).

At the turn of the millennium, the Hizmet movement appeared in the global arena as an Islamic revivalist movement whose discourse resonated with the commonly shared universal values of every culture, ethnicity, and religion. For some groups, this new discourse was a mere appropriation to be accepted by mainstream societies. For the followers of the movement, these universal values are a part of Islam, and are thus informed by Islamic principles, and should therefore be genuinely followed. Because of this, the movement aimed to reach out to a broad range of audiences both in local and global contexts.

The Hizmet movement of Turkey was inspired by Said Nursi (1877–1960) and founded by Fethullah Gülen. Unlike some other revivalist movements, the Hizmet movement did not position itself as an antithesis to Westernization, secularism, and modernity. Moving beyond binary concepts, the movement adopted an all-inclusive attitude, which re-introduced to the world Islam as a universal religion, with the capacity to accommodate people of diversity and meet the needs of every age by interpreting the immutable verses of the Qur'an according to the social and cultural conditions of the time.

This movement focused *not* on how Muslims can better practice their religion and survive in this challenging world as Islamic societies and communities, but rather how they could reach out to all corners of the world through Islam's universalist principles. These principles include notions of peace and tolerance to overcome internal and external as well as local and global major problems, which are formulated in Said Nursi's Damascus Sermon as ignorance, fragmentation, and poverty. Inspired by Nursi, Gulen formulated his

movement based on three solutions: education, dialogue, and charity activities in Turkey first and then around the world.

This paper thus explores the Hizmet movement's historical, theological, and social roots as a transnational Islamic revivalist movement. It analyzes the movement's outreach across multicultural societies and its capability to adapt to a changing world through its educational and interfaith and intercultural activities across the globe. While unpacking thirty years of the Hizmet movement's activities and the contribution to the literature, the paper also addresses some of the criticisms that have emerged regarding the movement and its activities, particularly in the wake of the 2016 failed coup attempt in Turkey. The result of this failed coup has left the movement in limbo.

It should be noted that much criticism toward the movement mostly emerged in recent years, and the movement did not face much backlash in its early years of development, which is perhaps why, for example, one senior U.S. government official stated that the movement and its activities are "too good to be true" (Hansen 2013). With this in mind, this paper explores the development of the Hizmet movement and how much of its initiatives rapidly left a positive mark on Muslim societies around the world. The paper is thus structured chronologically, tracing the birth, growth, stagnation, and transition (or according to some collapse) of the movement. The paper, by extension, too, positions the Hizmet movement within facing other Islamic revivalist movements as a movement born out of similar conditions but taking a slightly different direction: the universalism of Islam, which challenges the prevalent binary 'us and them' discourses produced mostly in ethno-centric political discourses.

## 2. The Historical Development of the Hizmet Movement

Although founded in the 1960s on the ideas of Fethullah Gülen, the Hizmet movement was shaped in response to the socio-political and economic circumstances that fashioned much of Turkey throughout the 1970s and 1980s (Sunier 2014). Arising as a religious innovative force, the movement rapidly became known for its shared ideals and teachings of universal principles as well as its intense web of formal and informal networks. Following the spirit of the Ottoman millet system in which every faith community had freedom to run its own institutions (Barkley 2005), the Hizmet movement aimed to be "faith-inspired in motivation, yet faith-neutral or inclusive in manifestation" (Keles 2016, p. 5). Gülen himself regards the movement as a cultural activity whose spirit is based on the voluntary cooperation of many people who may not have organic ties or mutual acquaintances, much less know each other, but who all share the faith of Islam (Koyuncu-Lorasdağı 2010).

While the core principles of the movement are self-evidently spiritual and theological, the socio-political realities that took place since its founding were influential in molding the dynamics that would define the movement and its practice. Despite coming from religiously vigorous circles of an Eastern city, Erzurum, Gülen first began speaking to the masses upon his official appointment as an *imam* (religious leader) to Edirne, on the border of Eastern Europe, where alcohol consumption was relatively high and religious observance was neglected among the locals. Gülen was then appointed to Izmir, a Hellenistic city with a multi-religious population, but one where religion attracted little interest. Because of this, the city became known as *gavur Izmir* (infidel Izmir)—a label that also indicated the ancient Greek city's failure to assimilate into contemporary Anatolia's conservative country culture.

During this time in the early 1960s, Turkey found itself under the influence of adverse secularization and materialism. Schools were taught by teachers who stressed evolution and questioned the existence and belief in God. This epidemic was also present during Nursi's time. When a group of high school students complained about the 'poisonous ideas' spread by their teachers, Nursi provided commentary on faith related verses by examining the verses with science and reason (Nursi, Bediuzzaman Said n.d.). Gülen would also deliver conferences on Darwin's theory of evolution in the early 1970s to the youth at the time of great doubt and would tie together religion and science in his talks to show the

compatibility between the two (Gülen 1971). As a result, science and reason became the core teaching of Hizmet inspired schools; students were encouraged to become teachers to raise a ‘Golden Generation’ of Muslims in Turkey and abroad.

Being an *imam* (religious leader) in a highly secular city like Izmir where religious observance was ignored and where locals did not attend mosques, Gülen had to deliver his talks in coffee houses where men gathered and gambled for hours (Pandya 2012). In these casual gatherings, Gülen would gradually warm people up to the idea of religion and the observance of religious practice and abstinence from sin such as gambling. When the Hizmet movement was founded in the late 1960s, this circumspect activism became its key strategy. In a time of illiberal secularism that dominated Turkey during the Cold War, the movement’s adherents could only engage in cautious activism and dialogue, much like Gülen himself, to protect themselves from being made outcasts by the Kemalist bureaucracy (Balci and Miller 2012). Such discreteness became a characteristic of the Hizmet movement’s general approach so much so that followers who lived through the democratic periods and military regimes of Turkish history had to deliberately conceal their Islamic dynamics while engaging with the public, and at the same time, meet their expectations, such as delivering high quality education to prepare the youth for the competitive university entrance exams (Balci and Miller 2012).

In the 1990s, however, Gülen and his followers broke the paradigms about religion, religiosity, and religious leaders in Turkey, by opening university tutorial centers throughout the country and starting dialogue activities between different streams of the society. But it was the discreteness due to military occupation and the rise of secularism that forced the movement to put their Islamic narrative on the forefront of their mission.

The movement’s thought and practice highlight the dynamism and diversity of not only the Islamic faith, but Muslim politics, as its activities and values contest the categories set by Western liberal history—due to orientalist attitudes—onto Islam and Muslim societies. Their model shows that there is no ‘template of ideas’; Islam, as well as its Muslim societies and faith-based organisations, “are influenced by a number of factors, which, while including scripturally defined precepts, also include national identities, economic circumstances, and social status” (Eickelman and Piscatori 1996, p. xi). Aside from proactively showing the dynamism of Islam and Muslim politics, they also challenge modernization theory—a theory that centers on the sharp and artificial contrast between ‘modernity’ and ‘tradition’, whereby tradition is construed “in negative terms only” (Eickelman and Piscatori 1996, p. 23). Tradition, as the movement shows, helps to “facilitate development and social and political changes *because* they are cast in terms of the traditional framework” (Eickelman and Piscatori 1996, p. 25).

The movement has a successful history of activism which has fashioned a distinctive response to the questions posed by modernity. Its contemporary interpretation of Islam has allowed not only Turkish Muslims, but Muslims from around the world to develop their own institutions to engage with modernity and its challenges. By the 1980s, the movement evolved into a nationwide education-focused community. It had successfully developed the biggest charity and philanthropy organization (called *Kimse Yok Mu*), several publication houses that publish magazines, books, and journals in several areas, and had the most selling Turkish newspaper (called *Zaman*) with a circulation of one million. Thijl Sunier (2014) writes that global conditions have generated new and diverse forms of sociability that has led to new Muslim self-understandings, whereby Muslims increasingly use Islam as a propositional model for civility, responsibility, and civic engagement. As a non-political movement investing its capital into establishing civil organisations, the Hizmet movement is frequently addressed in the literature as a form of ‘civil Islam’, whereby its practices and theological groundings are, in fact, seen as having explicitly cosmopolitan underpinnings (Sunier 2014).

From the 2000s, however, the movement evolved into a transnational entity concentrated on dialogue and non-denominational education. Focusing on the Hizmet movement in Germany, Araks Pashayan argues that in instances where separatist withdrawal take



place among Muslim communities across German towns and cities, the Hizmet movement encourages integration based on cultural exchange and enrichment rather than assimilation. They have built centers and schools to build a bridge between the two communities. This integration model allows the German population to understand and accept the values and experiences of Turkish and other ethnic Muslim minority groups who feel isolated from the rest of German society (Pashayan 2012).

It is the movement's depth and breadth that allows it to root itself to a variety of contexts, making it and its practices "an 'outward-looking' rather than an 'inward-looking' form of organization, which constitutes the dominant mode of religious and interest-based organizations" (Krause 2012, p. 57). Wanda Krause writes that because of its dynamism and diversity, the Hizmet movement is uniquely positioned to tackle instances of terrorism and Islamophobia, for example, as it embraces a 'common good' and emphasizes the universality of values, spirituality, and principles of justice—goals that directly challenge dominant dualistic perceptions of religion, particularly Islam, as being a source of conflict in a modernized, secular world of 'war on terror' era (Krause 2012).

### 3. The Spiritual Dynamics of the Hizmet Movement since Its Inception

A former Secretary General of the United Nations once stated that peacebuilding is "action to identify and support structures which will tend to strengthen and solidify peace in order to avoid a relapse into conflict" (Boutros-Ghali 1992, p. 204). What he meant here is that peacebuilding stems from an active civil society that generates social capital in the form of cooperation over religious and ethnic divisions, trust, and open debate which is conducive to peace and harmony between all sections of society. As civil society is an important space where pluralism and diversity can be fostered, it therefore can play a positive role in sustaining peace (Hampson 1996). The most notable and effective method of peacebuilding by a civil society, however, is preventative peacebuilding—for instance, community capacity building and fostering collaborative relationships amongst different groups within societies.

It is instrumental to stimulate each community's own local, cultural, and religious dynamics to be able to foster effective long-term peace. The Hizmet movement has strategically utilized some spiritual dynamics to become a civil society and a transnational faith-based movement, focused on love and tolerance through education and dialogue. The movement mobilized its followers with "strong faith-based motivation, long term commitment, religious, spiritual and moral authority and ability to facilitate constructive social relations between different groups of population" (Esposito and Yilmaz 2010, p. 4). In this instance, it is not so much religion that is influential, but rather "the ways in which it has been interpreted and practiced" (Esposito and Yilmaz 2010, p. 4) by the movement to create a stable yet dynamic and diverse civil society.

While most leaders of other revivalist movements fixated on the problem of the West, Fethullah Gülen avoided such discourse. He concerned himself primarily with peacebuilding in highly diversified modern societies where internal conflicts and fragmentations would be the more real, urgent, and upfront issue in the twenty-first century, rather than a mere paradigm like the Islam-versus-West discourse. As such, Gülen emphasized the need for a new generation of Muslims to equip themselves with agreeable qualities, like wisdom, compassion, faith, and knowledge, for them to rise above the structural inequalities and the socio-political circumstances they faced (Agai 2002). In fact, Gülen's ideas were inspired by his own time and circumstances. Upon examining his own generation, he found that lack of proper education was the essence of the problem that many young believing people faced. Using this observation as a guide, Gülen then inspired his followers to found educational institutions to develop a more knowledgeable and inclusive generation—one that can integrate their Muslim identity and morality with modern realities and positive sciences (Çelik 2010). He called this dream generation *Altın Nesil* (the 'Golden Generation').

Unlike some revivalist movements which seek to erect a caliphate under a capable political leader and unlike some revivalist spiritual movements who promote their leaders

as spiritual saviors, the Hizmet movement promoted an embodiment of a leadership by an entire generation called the Golden Generation, which was to change the image of Islam in the entire world. This dream young generation aimed to cultivate “an intellectual and spiritual enlightenment drawn from the traditional sources of Islam” (Çelik 2010, p. 61). But even though the Golden Generation bases itself around religion, Bekim Agai argues that it has been transformed from being, initially, a so-called Turkish form of civil Islam to a more universal ideal (Agai 2002). Part of this transformation is the result of Gülen’s conviction that, although there are certain aspects of Islam that are not open to interpretation, there are other areas within Islam that can be subjected to disparate settings, historical conditions, language, sociocultural characteristics and so forth, and are thus open to interpretation (Çelik 2010). For example, the Islamic conception of life in Morocco “came to mean activism, moralism, and intense individuality”, while the very same concept in Indonesia “emphasized aestheticism, inwardness, and the radical dissolution of personality” (Çelik 2010, p. 62). And so, when political scientists spoke of a ‘Clash of Civilizations’, Gülen fervently urged the building of ‘breakwaters’ to prevent such a clash (Saritoprak 2010).

Gülen’s Golden Generation, in some way, exemplifies Ibn Khaldun’s emphasis on the establishment of peace in society. For both Gülen and Ibn Khaldun, peacebuilding is a sacred task. But unlike Ibn Khaldun, whose theology on peace rested on the notion of *asabiyya* (group solidarity)—thus carrying its own risks of excessive group loyalty which can be detrimental to the maintenance of a harmonious society—Gülen based his peace theology on the integrity of the individual where peacebuilding is one of ‘bottom-up’ social change (Saritoprak 2010; Sykiainen 2006). In this way, the Golden Generation, through the quality of its individuals, should be able to practice and spread justice and compassion in their societies. Gülen (2006, p. 110) says:

... maybe in the near future some selfless people, who sacrifice themselves to make others live, with united hearts and minds through their efforts ... These selfless people will discover the interconnectedness of the divine command and the laws of nature. People will repent of the previous meaningless fights with one another ... Everyone will love human beings as a duty towards God. It is exactly this time when the world, which is a corridor to Paradise, will become a paradise-like place that will always be enjoyed.

Here Gülen stresses the importance of dedicated, selfless individuals in the establishment of peace. Without them, or without a ‘Golden Generation’, such peace would not be possible. To maintain these ideals of peace and ensure the flourishing of these individuals, Gülen placed an emphasis on educational institutions whereby these institutions would help “bring up such individuals from the realm of imagination to the realm of realization” (Saritoprak 2010, p. 181).

Gülen’s theological ideas can be collated under three main areas: service; positive action; and *tamthil* (representation), which can be reframed as the “tongue of conduct” (Ozubuyuk 2013). These three areas—or ‘spiritual dynamics’—have mobilized followers of the Hizmet movement and shaped the movement’s outlook since its inception, along with, of course, Gülen’s ‘Golden Generation’ and peacebuilding strategies. All three spiritual concepts are related to ‘viceregency’. As a Qur’anic term, it reminds human beings that their role in this world is to live as ‘divine representatives’ (Qur’an, 2:30). This concept, according to B. Jill Carroll, loads the movement’s followers with a sense of social responsibility (Carroll 2007). For Gülen (2005), viceregency is an action and determination to make a positive change in the world:

In fact, we need genius minds with iron wills that are able to carry the role of vicegerent of God on Earth, and which are able to intervene in events and challenge the orphan spirit and puny thought which attach no importance to the consciousness of responsibility, humane values, knowledge, morality, true contemplation, virtue, and art in such a vast territory, we need refined minds and

an iron will which will embrace and interpret creation in its depth and entirety and humanity in all its worldly and other-worldly vastness.

Gülen organically connects the social responsibility of the vicegerent human being with service to humanity as a spiritual performance. Salih Yücel elaborates on this concept by referring to a renowned Prophetic saying: “the master of the people is the one who serves them” (Yücel 2018, p. 95). Gülen systematizes this leadership-servanthood interaction with a spiritual backdrop through education, humanitarian aid, and dialogue in the service of humanity—no matter their religious, cultural, ethnic, economic, political, or social background (Yücel 2018).

Moreover, instead of limiting the Hizmet movement’s social responsibility to their home country Turkey, Gülen envisions to spread the service throughout the world by following the Qur’anic prospect of ‘viceregency on Earth’ and employing the concept of *hijra* (migration on the path of God) (Yücel 2018). Through these two concepts, Gülen was able to inspire the movement to become transnational as they ‘migrated’ and settled from Turkey to other parts of the world, and actively and confidently interacted with the host societies without feeling inferior. Furthermore, their effective interaction with the host society since the early years of their migration has broken the migrant versus host society, and assimilation versus alienation debates, which have been in force in multicultural western societies for decades.

Apart from their social capital, which will be addressed in the following sections, the movement’s spiritual motivation behind migration was influential in their quick and effective integration and contribution to mainstream societies. Although the idea was to represent Islam, the movement did not preach the faith nor conducted forced conversions. They instead focused on highlighting Islam’s universal values to the worldwide community, particularly as Gülen considered representation to be a Prophetic method and therefore a valuable essence of the movement and its goals (Yücel 2018).

This spiritual goal and method worked well to overcome prejudices against Islam and Muslims. Personal interactions with real and presentable Muslims demystified old orientalist dichotomies while proving anti-Muslim arguments wrong. This was made effective due to, not only the movement’s belief in its social responsibility to act as viceregents on Earth, but also the movement’s transnational reach, personal interaction, and institutional collaborations in the host societies that allowed the movement to effectively demystify all imaginary stereotypes toward Islam and Muslims.

Along with their focus on social responsibility through viceregency and migration, the Hizmet movement has also placed a focus on positive action. Both positive action and service are mutually inclusive since both discharge self-interest for the sake of public interest (Walton 2015). Positive action includes being proactive rather than reactive and “engrossing oneself in the constructive actions of building and repairing rather than engaging in destructive behavior” (Yücel 2018, p. 109). Gülen’s action-oriented approach is inspired by Nursi who lived under surveillance by an adverse secular system yet said: “Our duty is to act positively; it is not to act negatively [ . . . ] We are charged with responding with patience and thanks to all the difficulties we may encounter in this positive service of belief which results in the preservation of public order and security” (Walton 2015, p. 43).

The followers of the Hizmet movement have upheld positive action by occupying themselves with altruistic services and treating positive action not only as an end goal, but as a method of achieving the desired positive outcome in any given situation or circumstance (Walton 2014). Are these core ideas and values of the Hizmet movement practicable for everyone, especially in times and places when, and where, totalitarianism is in force? Despite not enforcing its high standard to lay people, Gülen instructed his followers to show unconditional positive action. For example, the movement showcased positive action when it faced political allegations and persecutions orchestrated by the Turkish President, Tayyip Erdogan. The movement was accused of plotting against the state by conducting a failed coup in 2016, which has, since that time, faced “intense and massive hate crimes and severe persecutions, some of which concluded with deaths and



suicides while in custody" (Alkan 2019, p. 212), the purge of thousands of Hizmet followers, and international defamation campaigns. On the one hand, Gülen sought justice from the authorities and demanded international inquiry of the failed coup by a judicially independent international body, and on the other, he encouraged his followers to show patience and positive action in the face of intensifying oppression against the movement after the coup attempt (Shalal 2016). Gülen deliberately utilized religious dynamics to curb emotional eruption and any potential rebellions within the movement to preserve peace and fulfill the movement's positive action motto.

Cemil Alkan's textual analysis of Gülen's sermons delivered within the first two months after the coup attempt found that Gülen focused on holding oneself accountable; acknowledging the hardship of the Prophetic path; and showing patience and positive response with mannerisms (Alkan 2019). Accordingly, while publicly challenging injustice and seeking civic ways to reinstitute justice, Gülen did not allow frustration to overcome the movement as it could easily turn into social discord and contradict with the existential pillars of the movement (such as peace, positive action, and dialogue).

In his post-coup sermons, Gülen reminds his followers of Nursi's formula of abstaining from "the cruel principle of giving a similar response" and encourages oppressed followers of the movement to be forgiving just like the Prophets were in times of hardship (Alkan 2019). For example, the Prophet Muhammad had said "no blame on you" as the conqueror of Mecca, while Prophet Yusuf forgave his brothers for their wrongdoing when he became the ruler of Egypt. Gülen also moves beyond religion and reminds his followers to not ruin the positive reputation of the movement, but "maintain the legacy of the movement in the face of hardship" (Alkan 2019, p. 224). On the first anniversary of the coup, while persecutions were still on the rise, Gülen declared: "The power is embedded in the truth and the truthful one is merciful" (Alkan 2019, p. 225). Gülen's call for patience during a time of turbulence does not stem from despair, or even passivism, but rather "a determined strategy to prevail to the end with endurance" (Alkan 2019, p. 225). Evidently, positive action is infused in Gülen's discourse style, including the movement's response to negative stereotyping of Muslims. Without referring to Orientalism or anti-Muslim discourses, Gülen undermines Islam-versus-West dichotomy by focusing on universal values that are adhered by everyone, deliberately straying away from binary terminology which would inevitably produce an oppositional 'Other' in relation to oneself.

There are two key streams where the Hizmet movement has implemented these spiritual dynamics and has shown how their historical development influenced much of their ideals and practice: dialogue and education. Both streams directly challenge binary 'us and them' discourse through their use of inclusive language and espousal of universal values for they show that religion and modernity can co-exist—or more specifically, that Islam is dynamic and diverse and as a universal religion, the values promoted by Islam can be implemented to reach solutions to both global and local problems.

#### 4. The Hizmet Movement and Its Dialogue Institutions

To effectively overcome fragmentation, which was diagnosed by Nursi as one of the overarching problems of the society, the Hizmet movement facilitates 'a dialogue of civilizations' whereby civilizations are thought to be built through interfaith dialogue and education, rather than inter-communal and inter-religious rivalries and conflicts (Bozkurt and Yildirim 2012). The movement therefore "synthesize[s] tradition and modernity, religion and science" in a proactive attempt to oppose essentialist Orientalist and exclusivist Islamist claims that Islam and Muslim politics are monolithic (Hefner 2005, p. 5). Akbar Ahmed (2007, p. 6) points out the timely and much needed response of the movement to a 'perceived' clash, which has sometimes been reinforced by both parties:

In a world where the most prominent Muslim leaders speak of conflict and confrontation, Gülen provides us with a 'new voice' that calls people of all faiths to the 'divine table'. Through his guidance we can create a world where dialogue is our first course of action and confrontation is our very last.

The Hizmet movement's advocacy for dialogue through dialogue institutions navigated by Gülen's extensive discourse of peaceful coexistence has subsequently led to the establishment of interfaith and intercultural practice models across the world community. By emphasizing the universal values people share, and thus de-emphasizing their differences, Gülen finds diversity and tolerance to be a natural phenomenon—people can coexist peacefully despite differences in cultures and religions (Gülen 2004).

Universal dialogue has become the “main tool of social innovation and conflict resolution for social inclusion, coherence and peaceful co-existence” for the Hizmet movement (Yilmaz 2007, p. 25). This is rooted in Gülen's effort to promote dialogue and tolerance across all groups in society, in Turkey and abroad. Prior to September 11, the movement established the Journalists and Writers Foundation—a foundation that sought to “support strategic public intellectual initiatives in the promotion of dialogue” (Barton 2007, p. 4). The Journalists and Writers Foundation is an example of the Hizmet movement's proactive approach in tackling anti-Muslim discourse, particularly as it was founded prior to September 11 where Islamophobia became a critical issue. The foundation is also an example of the movement's willingness to extend their dialogue not just into schools, but across other platforms, such as the media, arts, sport, academia, and religious streams.

The Hizmet movement entered the post-9/11 era with interfaith dialogue and a focus on education already developed and implemented. In fact, the movement's first dialogue centers, established in major Western cities, predate 9/11. For example, in 1999, the Dialogue Society was established in London and the Rumi Forum in Washington. Accordingly, the movement's pre-9/11 interfaith activities were not a mere response to, nor a defense of, Muslims in the face of the 9/11 attacks. The dialogue activities, as Paul Weller (2012, p. 18) concludes, have “offer[ed] resources that engage with the secular; are ready for dialogue with Christians; are confident of what Islam can offer: and yet also acknowledge the current reality of the situation for Muslims and Islam in Europe [and elsewhere] rather than promoting only an idealized vision of the past or the future”. Because this type of dialogue was neither defensive nor responsive, and was developed confidently from within long before 9/11, it has effectively been able to dispel the doubts about Islam and Muslims represented by the movement.

Co-existence and diversity are apparent within the movement's own organizations; on its board were prominent members of mainstream western societies and members from different religious, political, and philosophical backgrounds, seen in their dialogue organizations like the Rumi Forum and the Australian Intercultural Society (Rumi Forum 2019a, 2019b). By including ethno-religiously diverse members, students, and teachers in their dialogue organisations and in their schools, the movement—as a minority group—has confidently expanded beyond its comfort zone to amalgamate with the mainstream population. This was a common practice especially in countries where the Muslim population was scarce, such as in Russia, Mongolia, Burma, Nepal, Vietnam, Korea, and Cambodia.

The movement overtly celebrated diversity in schools by organizing the International Festival of Language and Culture, held every year in the countries where Hizmet inspired schools operate (International Festival of Language and Culture (IFLC) 2019a). During these festivals, students from Hizmet schools across their respective countries come together, irrespective of their religious, cultural, or ethnic identities, to perform local, English, and Turkish songs, dances, poetry, and other performative arts. Through their performances, the students deliver universal messages and showcase those values through the building of friendships during the preparation stages (International Festival of Language and Culture (IFLC) 2019a). Several people have expressed their awe of the movement's initiative, with some stating, “events that encourage young people from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds to share their experiences are very important. Because each generation has to rediscover and get to know itself, so that peaceful co-existence remains a matter of course” (International Festival of Language and Culture (IFLC) 2019b). The International Festival of Language and Culture is an example of how an ideal world could come about through positive dialogue initiatives. Without putting religion or religiosity to the foreground,

such practical encounters facilitated by the Muslim founders of these schools indicates Islam's appreciation of indigenous cultures. This gesture, in the context of underdeveloped countries, also meant a clear deviation from the footsteps of those hegemonic, missionary, and colonial foundations which exploited and undermined local people, their languages, and their cultures.

In the context of Western societies, the movement's "practical global effort for peace and understanding" (Wright 2012, p. 171) shaped an example of "how migrants [ . . . ] can adapt and integrate into a host society dominated by a very different culture [which shows that] peaceful coexistence is possible amongst different ethnic groups [ . . . ] in a European context" and within other Muslim minority countries (Lacey 2010, p. 229). As these various examples have illustrated, the movement has successfully managed to operate confidently as a global phenomenon in different geographies of the world, including the West.

### 5. The Hizmet Movement and Education

Education has become another means for the movement to reach wider society via parent communities. According to Gülen, education is key for the development of intercivilizational dialogue and collaboration. This is because it is only through education that one can establish peace; education breaks the barriers produced by stigmatization, racism, discrimination, and conflict. Nursi's diagnosis of ignorance as one of the main problems in our society inspired Gülen's educational activities—a vital requisite for economic, social, and political advancement. Accordingly, "individuals will respect democratic law and human rights only if they receive a sound education", since social justice and peace "are achieved by intellectually enlightened people with strong moral values and a sense of altruism" (Ebaugh 2010, p. 34). Gülen continually emphasized Islam's universal values to reach wider society in a way that aligned with the ethical principles behind the movement's foundations.

While prominent Islamic scholars of Western academia, such as Isma'il Al Faruqi, Naquib al-Attas and Sayyed Hossein Nasr were heavily involved in philosophical discussions on Islamization of knowledge in the 1980s, Gülen did not show any particular interest in this debate (Al-Faruqi 1987; Dzilo 2012). Problematizing distinctively two different epistemological sources was an intellectually valid, but equally binary, discussion. Instead of Islamizing knowledge, Gülen opted to show how science and religion are intrinsically connected through the movement's quality educators and educational institutions. This allowed Hizmet schools to tie science and religion with their 'service for humanity' concept and encouraged students to engage in the love of learning. However, Gülen did not start up these educational institutions himself; these were taken onboard by the Hizmet movement who wanted to put into practice Gülen's emphasis on the importance of education and of creating environments in which young people, Muslims and non-Muslims, could expand their knowledge. For Gülen,

... school is essentially the 'theater' in which all the scattered things of the universe are displayed together. It provides its pupils with the possibilities of continuous reading and speaks even when it is silent. Because of that, although it seems to occupy one phase of life, the school dominates all times and events. Every pupil re-enacts during the rest of life what he or she has learned at school and derives continuous influence therefrom.

(Kurtz 2005, p. 380)

The Hizmet movement has established a variety of initiatives, such as charities, foundations, media, television channels, radio, business associations, and schools, to build and maintain a peaceful civil society (Kayaoglu 2010). But it is the educational institutions that take up most of their effort and operate worldwide as non-denominational and independent schools.

Within the schools, the movement offers an integrated education model where technical and moral training are combined—namely, the integration of science and faith-inspired values. This decision was shaped by the historical experience of Turkish society—a society

that has “gone through violent ideological and political conflicts during the last one hundred years” (Bozkurt and Yildirim 2012, p. 50). Moreover, competition between the secular and the religious educational systems in Turkey “lay at the heart of the social tensions and crises, because the graduates of these schools with such restricted focus lacked an integrated perspective for the future of society” (Michel 2003, p. 72). And so, Gülen inspired to develop an educational system that offered solutions for local and global problems, and a system that imparted humanitarian as well as moral values in students while also preparing them for the competitive world of science and technology.

The movement began with a few schools in Turkey in the 1990s, expanding to Central Asia and the Balkans shortly thereafter. But by the end of 2014, these schools flourished across more than 160 countries around the world primarily because they preserve a modern, secular curriculum to “lay the foundations for a more humane, tolerant citizenry of the world where people are expected to cultivate their own faith perspectives and promote the well-being of others” (Kurtz 2005, p. 380). Most schools have produced highly educated individuals who have taken on high-ranking positions with the power to change the fabric of their countries through their knowledge and activism (James 2017). This initiative, where schools provide a science and universal values-based education, challenges contemporary notions that science and religion are irreconcilable. It also challenges the belief that Islam and Muslims are outdated and inferior, who do not want to make a positive contribution to their societies.

The reconciliation of science and religion has been proactively introduced in Hizmet-inspired schools not through the act of preaching but through the “the tongue of conduct” (Ozubuyuk 2013). As Thomas Michel wrote, “secular educators saw religion as at best a useless expenditure of time and at worst an obstacle to progress”, but for Gülen, and by extension the Hizmet movement, science and religion are not only compatible forces, but they also complement one another (Michel 2003, p. 69).

As Gülen (2002) asserts,

... we no longer have any other way of escaping from the cloudy atmosphere of illusions enveloping us, or any other way to reach Truths and, more importantly, the most manifest Truth. To achieve this, we must become unique representatives of scientific knowledge combined with religious spirit.

Gülen’s vision for the education model is not to impose an understanding of Truth through faith and science, but rather to help raise individuals with a balanced worldview. In his view, the education and training of a new generation of Muslims—the ‘Golden Generation’—should be holistic; the aim is to raise “ideal people”, individuals of “thought, action and inspiration” who are able to negotiate themselves through a rapidly demanding and changing world (Graskemper 2007). These students would then use their knowledge and training for the service of humankind, bringing harmony and understanding between different peoples as the material and spiritual realms were reconciled in their educational upbringing (Yavuz 2013).

Writing about the importance of education in modern society in general, Robert W. Hefner (2005) argues that education has “a greater democratic benefit when it conveys a spirit of intellectual ‘bridging’ rather than exclusive ‘bonding’”. What Hefner means here is that education that generates a bridging of multiple ideas in the form of collaboration is more important than exclusivity because it is the bridging of ideas that creates a natural bond between different people, and this, in turn, fosters an environment of harmony, tolerance, and diversity—and even espouses dynamism. Hefner also writes that “education is the most paradigmatic of modern cultural institutions. Today no society can compete even in the lower rungs of the global order without a well-run educational system [ . . . ] higher education is a shimmering example of all that is best about modern freedom and civic decency” (Hefner 2005).

Indeed, educational institutions, when offering a combination of faith-based, science-based, and other based knowledge—much like those established by the Hizmet movement—can foster ‘sustainable development’ by connecting local values and cultures with inter-

national values, preparing specialists through capacity building to promote a sustainable future, and creating public spaces through civil society associations (Vargas 2000). The Hizmet movement, therefore, provides intermediary networks that contribute to the integration of individual citizens and the state (Özdalga 2005).

The integration of individual citizens and the state is a method of peacebuilding; in Hizmet inspired schools, “young people from different religions, languages, and cultures study, are educated, and admired in the same educational institutions. Loving and understanding each other is the main principle” (Sevindi 2008, p. 75). For example, in Kenya, Hizmet-run schools have not only been functioning as secular alternatives to religious Christian missionary and Islamic schools, but “also as barriers to potential ethno-religious conflict between Kenya’s local Christian tribes and its politically empowering Muslim minority” (Kalyoncu 2008, p. 350). The movement has helped locals in Uganda to take a pragmatic approach to development by “instill[ing] in them the notion of relying on their own resources instead of international aid” (Kalyoncu 2008, p. 350). In the Philippines—a country with communities stigmatized by Muslim-Christian battles—the Hizmet-led schools have brought together Christian and Muslim students, not by taking part in the conflict, but by identifying “common grounds where they get together and cooperate to tackle their common problems” (Kalyoncu 2007, p. 605). According to Zeki Saritoprak (2007), the movement’s educational institutions, overall, have contributed to the “building of peace in many areas of conflict”, including Kosovo, Albania, northern Iraq, Northern Ireland, Macedonia, and Banda Aceh.

The Hizmet movement ensures that all educational institutions are run by quality educators and thus emphasizes the importance of addressing “all aspects of a person’s mind, spirit, and self” (Bozkurt and Yildirim 2012, p. 55). An educator is comprehensive and incorporates universality in their teaching methodology. They provide guidance and implement it with flexibility according to the circumstances of the school and its students (Agai 2003). Gülen also stresses that the educator’s role is to “fill science with wisdom so that it will be applied usefully to society” (Agai 2003, p. 58). In Albania, for example, the Hizmet educators, due to their focus on universal values, science, and quality education, gained approval by both the government and the Albanian public. But when the movement began their activities from as early as 1992, there was resistance, partly because of strong Albanian nationalist sentiments, and partly because Albania had “formed its national identity in opposition to the Ottoman Empire” and thus did not want Islamic or Turkish nationalism to be promoted in its schools (Agai 2003, p. 66). As the movement slowly began to take influence, they engaged in activities that allowed the students to develop a “joy of giving” while also teaching them discipline and providing them with guidance (Agai 2003, p. 66). One teacher viewed this initiative in a positive way, admiring the movement’s delivery of a “vision of humanity” to a society that had lost its “human dimension during its communist era” (Agai 2003, p. 66). Through this example, one can see how the Hizmet movement constructs its ideals around local concerns. This is made possible because of religious values being “transformed into a language of ethics” and it is this belief in shared values that prompted Gülen’s and by extension, the Hizmet movement, efforts at dialogue (Agai 2003, p. 66).

The movement’s emphasis on universal values, and educational and civic activities, also helped overcome the Turkish-Kurdish conflict (Gurbuz 2015; Kalyoncu 2008). As such, the movement’s commitment to principles of universalism, tolerance and positive action in their educational institutions allowed them to overcome political conflicts embedded in their own history, like Turks and Albanians since the Ottoman era, and the Turkish government and its Kurdish citizens since the 1920s.

In the global context, Hizmet-led schools have helped to break down misunderstandings around Islam’s incapacity to offer a modernized education model, and misunderstandings about Islam’s incapacity to align itself with scientific values and principles. In the meantime, the movement developed a unique Islamic revivalist approach by reaching out and fixing the problems of not only Muslim but a global audience by providing education



to remove ignorance, dialogue to remove fragmentation, and charity and social upward mobility through high quality education to remove poverty, not only among Muslims but also around the entire globe.

## 6. Criticism of the Hizmet Movement

While the Hizmet movement's inclusive humanistic attitude has been appreciated by their audience, some have expressed skepticism, finding the movement—as one senior U.S. government official said—“too good to be true” (Hansen 2013). Some of these criticisms were a reaction toward 9/11 by neo-conservatives and far right circles accusing many Muslim groups, including the Hizmet movement, of having hidden agendas and Islamist intentions (Hudson 2008). A similar criticism was echoed by some secular Kemalist circles of Turkey. Unlike other Islamic movements in Turkey, Gülen's discourse was surprisingly not at odds with the Kemalist secular state, which triggered suspicions about the authenticity of his leniency (Cagaptay 2010; Hudson 2009).

Some Islamic groups criticized the movement for staying away from Islamist rhetoric and agenda. The movement, neither seeking an Islamic state nor problematizing a secular state (if the state does not interfere in the groups' legal religious activities), was found to be un-Islamic by some circles and was accused of interacting with Christian and Jews more than Islamic groups. Gülen's dialogue initiatives, especially in its early days when he met with Pope John Paul II in 1998, were severely criticized and some conspiracies were generated, such as Gülen being appointed by John Paul II as a secret cardinal (WRM 2016). The movement's international language and culture festivals were also found by some to be un-Islamic; Turgul Keskin (2009, p. iv) defined Hizmet as an “Islamic movement without Islam”. The movement evidently drew criticism because it did not fit into existing categories of Islamic revivalist movements and religious organizations in the Muslim world, with the movement's “rapid expansion” also being questioned (Pew Research Center 2010).

Most of the recent political criticisms of the Hizmet movement are driven from pro-Erdogan circles due to the 2016 failed coup attempt in Turkey which, according to Erdogan, was plotted by the movement. Still, despite being exclusively two different Islamic movements (i.e., one is a politically motivated Islamist party, and the other is a spiritually motivated interfaith and education driven movement), Erdogan and Gülen developed a temporary “mutually beneficial relationship” in the 2000s (Sandal 2021). Yet, it quickly started to crack in 2010 with the Mavi Marmara flotilla crisis. The Turkish aid flotilla set off to break the Israeli blockade of Gaza, which resulted in the killing of ten Turkish activists. In contrast to AKP's condemnation of the Israeli attack, Gülen criticized the initiative as being counterproductive. Breaching the Israeli authority by not seeking a legal permission was a naïve and uncalculated move. This friction grew further in a series of political crises in the following years. Upon the arrest of Erdogan's crew consisting of senior bureaucrats, businessmen, and sons of ministers on corruption charges in Turkey's covert gold-for-oil trade with Iran on 17 and 25 December 2013, the movement was declared by Erdogan to be a “parallel state” which allegedly infiltrated in the police and judiciary in the service of “dark alliances” (Erkoyun 2020). Afterwards, Erdogan waged an open war on the movement by closing the movement's schools, tutorial centers, newspaper, television channel and seizing the movement's income generating channels like banks, publishing houses, and the businesses owned by Gülen's followers. Officers from the police and judiciary were sacked due to an alleged relationship with the movement. Furthermore, affiliating the failed coup attempt on 15 July 2016 with the movement, Erdogan declared the movement a terrorist organization and issued a state of emergency. Soon, more than 110,000 people were detained and nearly 50,000 imprisoned. Calling the coup attempt a “gift from God”, Erdogan purged all his opponents including the pre-existing lists of profiled public employees from the movement (Gol 2016).

The political turmoil stirred by the Erdogan government overshadows the reputation of the movement, inviting controversy. But Gülen's message to his followers and the world did not change; he called his followers to show patience and peace. Still, the movement's

educational, interfaith, intercultural, and charity institutions and activities have decreased significantly due to Erdogan's efforts to finish the movement in Turkey and overseas; however, the movement's institutions are still in force in those countries where Erdogan's political pressure is not influential.

Like in all Islamic revivalist movements, Gülen—as the movement's founder—played a central role in the dynamics and direction of the movement. Indeed, some academics referred to the movement as the 'Gülen movement' in recognition of his efforts (Ebaugh 2010; Esposito and Yilmaz 2010; Krause 2012; Lacey 2010; Michel 2003; Agai 2003; Kalyoncu 2007). However, Gülen's charismatic leadership and his direct association with the movement has raised some questions about whether there is sufficient internal criticism within the movement itself, and to what extent the movement would have the capacity to address new challenges once Gülen is no longer around to inspire its mission.

The movement has attempted to address these questions, to some extent. For example, its website and its followers' websites, social media, and YouTube channels have increasingly shown the movement's willingness to engage in some internal self-criticism on past mistakes, such as close affiliation with politics, rigid hierarchies, misuse of loyalties by intermediary persons, structures and systems bounded by strong personalities in power, weakened check and balance system, man-oriented nature of the movement, and the like. According to the discussions on their YouTube channels, some ex-members of the movement have fervently criticized Gülen and his close circle, while some of the movement's followers have directed their criticism not toward Gülen, but the executive members in his consultation team. Weller's recent book *Hizmet in Transitions*, especially the "New Foci for Old Questions" captures these post 2016 discussions (Weller 2022, pp. 131–90). But Gülen himself did not shy away from self-criticism. He publicly confessed that close interaction with politics was a forbidden affair (referring to the movement's close relationship with Erdogan's political party) (Alkan 2019) because the movement's core principles centered on the renewal of faith rather than political affairs—the same message Said Nursi spread through his teachings and sermons.

While criticisms toward the movement across media platforms and their social media pages have become increasingly diversified following the failed coup attempt in 2016, some critics interpret this new phase of the movement as counteractions for rebirth, while others yet see it as a sign of collapse.

## 7. Conclusions

Although being a product of similar circumstances, the Hizmet movement displayed some different features than politically revivalist Islamic revivalist movements of the time. Like other movements, the Hizmet movement was built upon a strong spiritual and theological basis. For instance, Gülen has been motivating his followers for decades with a Prophetic *hadith* which promised that the name of Prophet Muhammad will reach every place where sun sets and rises (Sahih Muslim 2889a, Book 41, Hadith 6904). Migrating to different corners of the world with this mission, the followers of the movement could flag the name of Prophet Muhammed by offering service to the host countries through education, interfaith/intercultural dialogue, and charity. These areas of service were strategic moves to solve the shared problems of the time which were ignorance, fragmentation, and poverty according to Said Nursi.

While most of the movements prioritized local problems and the revival of the *ummah* (Islamic community), the Hizmet movement aimed to reach out to non-Muslim populations in its early stages and prioritized connecting with non-Muslims based on service and other universal values like peace, love, tolerance, and dialogue—much needed assets to overcome local and global conflicts. The movement's long-term strategy, especially as a minority group within its countries of migration, showed how the movement based its operations on not converting nor controlling, but co-existing with other members of society. The mission of service to achieve the same shared goals by speaking the same shared (universal) language helped the acceptance, accommodation, and appreciation of

the movement in most of the corners of the world regardless of ethno-religiously and culturally differing contexts. The movement's co-existence framework also helped to subtly change the distorted image of Islam and Muslims in different corners of the world.

The adverse secular circumstances and long-lasting conflicts between religion and science as well as tradition and modernity greatly shaped the movement's objectives since its inception, which made it more attuned to the needs of the world community. The movement's vision, mission, and strategy has also proactively countered binary dichotomies such as science and religion, Islam and West, and the Clash of Civilizations by combining science with religion in its educational institutions and fostering dialogue to counter various types of conflicts through dialogue centers. As such, its interaction with real people in more than 160 countries through the 'language of conduct' effectively defeated centuries-old imaginary biases against Islam and Muslims.

In the meantime, the movement showcased that an Islamic revivalist movement can still be authentically Islamic without keeping *sharia* (Islamic law) and the Islamic state at the forefront of its mission and by adhering to democratic and secular systems which do not interfere in any legal religious affairs of the religious groups. By doing so, the movement's revivalism aimed for a renewal—a new interpretation of the Qur'anic verses—in tandem with the demands and values of the contemporary world, rather than a puritanical withdrawal from the existing world in attempt to escape to the dreamed time of the Prophet and *salaf al salihin* (pious ancestors) (Ali and Orofino 2018).

Instead of creating its own dream island, the movement opted to negotiate with existing challenges. Like other revivalists of ethno-religiously diverse societies such as Indonesia, the Hizmet movement also opted for collaboration rather than confrontation with authorities. The movement operated and interacted actively across the globe on a personal and institutional level, providing up to date, applicable, and effective solutions to the local and global post-colonial world through its educational, dialogue, and charity institutions. While being engineered by philosophically sound and well-grounded universal values, the Hizmet movement strictly adhered to its theological roots. Like Muhammadiyah, the Hizmet movement promoted education; like many other Islamic movements operating in the West in the wake of 9/11, the Hizmet movement also accelerated its interfaith activities across Western societies; like spiritual revivalist movements, the Sufi tradition laid the foundation of the Hizmet movement. Currently, the Hizmet movement finds itself in a significant transitional period (Weller 2022) due to being restricted by adverse political, economic, and social circumstances, which may challenge the movement's future progress and its prospects.

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