

## Article

# NGOization of Islamic Education: The Post-Coup Turkish State and Sufi Orders in Africa South of the Sahara

Ezgi Guner

Department of Anthropology, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, Champaign, IL 61801, USA; guner2@illinois.edu

**Abstract:** This article analyzes the recently formed transnational networks of Islamic education between Turkey and Africa south of the Sahara through the study of the neglected case of Erenköy Cemaati. The expansion of the schools affiliated with Erenköy Cemaati cannot be divorced from Turkey's Africa strategy and the growing importance of education within it since the late 2000s. Although Sufi orders and state institutions historically represent two divergent and conflicting streams of Islamic education in Turkey, the analysis of Erenköy Cemaati's schools in Africa south of the Sahara reveal their rapprochement in novel ways. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork in Turkey, Tanzania, and Senegal, this article shows that the complex relations between the Turkish state and Sufi orders in the field of education in Africa are facilitated by a constellation of non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Situating ethnographic data in historical context, it argues that the Islamic schools of Erenköy Cemaati are produced by the overlapping processes of the NGOization of Sufi orders in response to earlier state repression in Turkey and the NGOization of education in the wake of the neoliberal restructuring in Africa. While contributing to our understanding of post-coup Turkey and its evolving relations with Africa south of the Sahara, this article provides at the same time a new window into the NGOization of Islamic education on the continent.



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**Keywords:** Islamic education; Sufi orders; NGOization; transnationalism; Turkey; Senegal; Tanzania

## 1. Introduction

In 2008, Nouh Sawadogo visited the Naqshbandi Sheikh Osman Nuri Topbaş in Istanbul, Turkey.<sup>1</sup> Sawadogo was one of the founders of a local humanitarian non-governmental organization (NGO) in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, where faith-based (Islamic, Catholic, and Evangelical) organizations have rapidly multiplied since the 1980s (LeBlanc et al. 2013). This visit marked the beginning of his NGO's collaboration with the Sufi community, known as Erenköy Cemaati,<sup>2</sup> whose leadership Topbaş had inherited from his father a decade earlier. It was at the same time the beginning of a new wave of globalization for Erenköy Cemaati, which has already expanded its institutions of Islamic education and charity to the newly independent Turkic countries in the 1990s. When Sawadogo knocked on its door, the community was, therefore ripe, with transnational experience and abundant in resources to be able to grow beyond its concentration in the Caucasus, Central Asia, and the Balkans. The rapid expansion of the Islamic schools affiliated with Erenköy Cemaati in Africa south of the Sahara began with the establishment of a school in Ouagadougou shortly after Sawadogo's visit.

This article analyzes the recently formed transnational networks of Islamic education between Turkey and Africa south of the Sahara through the study of the neglected case of Erenköy Cemaati. Education, Islamic education in particular, has come to play an

<sup>1</sup> This anecdote is narrated in the article "Afrika'da İnsanlık Sınavındayız! Hüdayi Dostları Burkina Faso'da" ["Our humanity is tested in Africa! Friends of Hüdayi are in Burkina Faso"] (Ergül 2008).

<sup>2</sup> *Cemaat*, meaning community, is the main organizational form Sufi orders have taken in Turkey since their proscription in 1925.

increasingly important role in Turkey's relations with the continent since the late 2000s. This relates, on the one hand, to the internationalization of public institutions of Islamic learning in Turkey and the state scholarships made available to African students. On the other hand, in tandem with the state's international education policies, Sufi communities began to provide formal and informal Islamic education to African students by establishing schools on the continent as well as providing scholarships to study in Turkey. Although Sufi orders and state institutions historically represent two divergent and conflicting streams of Islamic education in Turkey, the analysis of Erenköy Cemaati's schools in Africa south of the Sahara reveal their rapprochement in novel ways. The analytical division between official (state) and unofficial (Sufi) Islam (Öztürk 2019; Sakallioğlu 1996), this article, therefore, argues, fails to explain the Sufi communities' relations with state institutions in the context of Islamic education in Africa. One of the indications of the blurring of the boundaries between official and unofficial Islam is the promotion of the model of *imam-hatip* school, the vocational schools created by the early Republican regime to train religious functionaries (*imams* and *hatips*) to disseminate official Islam, by the educators affiliated with a Sufi community. The case study of the schools of Erenköy Cemaati in Africa reveals, thus, a new convergence of the state-sanctioned pedagogic regimes and the Sufi pedagogic practices. The promotion of the *imam-hatip* model, this article further argues, is part of the broader project of promoting the Turkish model of state–religion relations in Africa south of the Sahara.

It is not a coincidence that the reconfiguration of state–religion relations in Turkey become evident in the field of education in Africa. The schools of Erenköy Cemaati have taken on a newfound importance with the acceleration of the Turkish government's anti-Gülen campaign on the continent in the wake of the 2016 coup attempt<sup>3</sup>. The Gülen Network, which was held responsible for plotting the coup, was at the same time the first religious community from Turkey to establish schools in Africa south of the Sahara. Known as the "Turkish schools" since the late 1990s, the good reputation of these schools was traded with the label of a terrorist organization in the post-coup Turkey. The schools then became the center stage of the political conflict between the Justice and Development Party (*Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, AKP) government and the Gülen Network unfolding on the African continent (Angey 2018; Dohrn 2018; Donelli 2019). While many of them have been shut down or transferred to the Turkish state, the schools of Erenköy Cemaati signed up for discrediting and replacing the Gülen schools as the rightful owner of the title "Turkish school". As the Gülen Network's schools were criminalized, the state support and collaboration they lost became readily available to the schools of Erenköy Cemaati.

Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork in Turkey, Tanzania, and Senegal, this article shows that the complex relations between the Turkish state and Sufi orders in the field of education in Africa are facilitated by a constellation of NGOs. Situating ethnographic data in historical context, it argues that the Islamic schools of Erenköy Cemaati are produced by the overlapping processes of the NGOization of Sufi orders in response to earlier state repression in Turkey and the NGOization of education in the wake of the neoliberal restructuring in Africa. While contributing to our understanding of post-coup Turkey and its evolving relations with Africa south of the Sahara, this article, therefore, provides a new window into the NGOization of Islamic education on the continent. By NGOization of Islamic education, I refer to the Islamic schools that can be categorized as NGO projects like drilling water well, distributing livestock, or sacrificing animal during Eid al-Adha<sup>4</sup>. In subsuming education under Islamic charity, the Turkish NGOs affiliated with Erenköy Cemaati make it freely available to African students without charging a fee, as in their

<sup>3</sup> For a detailed analysis of the 2016 coup attempt and its aftermath, see (Yavuz and Balci 2018; Watmough and Öztürk 2018; Houston 2018; Gökanksel and Türem 2019; Hammond 2020).

<sup>4</sup> Muslim holiday known as the Festival of Sacrifice.

other projects<sup>5</sup>. The role of NGOs in the education sector is, therefore, not limited to the mediation of the relations between states (Turkish and African) and Sufi orders but extends to the repositioning of students as aid recipients.

For this research, I conducted a rapid ethnographic assessment in the school and girls' dormitory in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, in March 2017. The dormitory was composed of 44 female students and several young Tanzanian teachers who were trained in a Qur'an school in Turkey. I conducted interviews and casual conversations with the Turkish administrators and educators as well as the Tanzanian teachers of the school in addition to observing the daily routine in the dormitory and the school. I also visited Rehema, the Turkish NGO that funded and coordinated the school, among other projects, and interviewed its director. In Senegal, I visited several times over the course of May and June 2017, the girls' boarding school and Şefkat Yolu, the NGO it is attached to, and interviewed the Turkish directors in both places who were husband and wife. I also interviewed the local staff of the Islamic Institute of Dakar under which the school and the Turkish NGO were found. Finally, I visited a local NGO in Konya, which sponsored the school in Bamako, Mali, in December 2016 and interviewed its staff. When I began my doctoral research, like many, my knowledge of "Turkish schools" on the continent were limited to those of the Gülen Network. It is only during my field trips to Tanzania and Senegal with different research questions in mind that I became aware of the schools affiliated with other religious communities, such as Erenköy Cemaati and Süleyman Efendi Cemaati. What follows are, thus, preliminary findings based on more or less spontaneous encounters during fieldwork and point at directions that require further research.

## 2. Locating and Naming the Schools of Erenköy Cemaati in Africa

Osman Nuri Topbaş was among the first group of adherents who traveled to Azerbaijan in the early 1990s for establishing schools while his father was still alive and holding the position of the sheikh. Behind the community's expansion toward Africa south of the Sahara, as narrated to me by one of the educators in Tanzania, was again the vision and dedication of Topbaş, this time as himself the sheikh:

Someone from Burkina Faso, I guess, one of the well-known religious leaders there comes to the Hüdayi Foundation and makes a request. It is told that . . . you know Osman Nuri Topbaş *hoca* (scholar)? He is the honorary chairman of the *vakıf* (foundation). The *cemaat* (community) has gathered around him anyhow. He says, 'I will go to Africa'. They are around a table. Everybody is like '*efendim* (sir), how are we going to go, the budget, etc.?' At last, he stands up, turns his back and says towards the window: 'I am going to go. You are free to come or stay, as you wish. I will find a way to go there.'

My interlocutor's narrative harkens back to the anecdote published in the *Altınoluk* magazine that I cited in the introduction. In this mythical moment of the sheikh's un-stoppable determination to "go to Africa", the difference between the racial discourses saturating Islamic engagements with Central Asia in the post-Cold War context and with Africa in the context of Turkey's foreign policy activism becomes clear. Whereas the Turkish religious groups' outreach to Turkic countries were naturalized on the basis of a shared racial identity, outreach to the racialized geography of Africa as *terra incognita* is presented as a daring project that requires a vision and willpower as unmatched as that of the sheikh. This story of genesis also reveals the NGOization of Sufi orders in Turkey, which then creates an ambiguity about the schools' connection to a Sufi community. My

<sup>5</sup> The schools linked to Erenköy Cemaati which provided full scholarship to all their students, at least during my fieldwork, is in stark contrast to the schools of the Gülen Network which in general are private and elite schools with high school fees and a limited number of students on scholarship. Although Gülen schools are private schools that few can afford, they used to be perceived (prior to their criminalization) by many in Turkey as charitable institutions educating African students whom otherwise wouldn't have access to education. This racialized misperception was important for generating funds from the adherents and sympathizers who would make donations as an act of Islamic charity. Despite the privatization and commodification of education, African students could still be racialized as aid recipients. The NGOization of Islamic education with the schools of Erenköy Cemaati differs from this moral economy by actually repositioning the students as aid recipients.

interlocutor's switching from *hoca* to honorary chairman and *cemaat* to *vakıf* in one breath illustrates the intertwinement of the titles and organizational forms of a Sufi order and a civil society organization.

The conflation of these two modes of organizing and power creates a confusion in the assessment of the schools in Africa whose ties to the Aziz Mahmud Hüdayi Foundation overshadow the relevance of Erenköy Cemaati. The following analysis reveals the centrality of the *cemaat* structure to the creation of funds, labor force, and the teaching content in the schools that remain obscure when they are exclusively associated with the Foundation. Aziz Mahmud Hüdayi Foundation was established in 1985 in Istanbul for the coordination of Islamic charity and education in Turkey and abroad. Prior to the establishment of the Foundation, Osman Nuri Topbaş, who was a pious businessman yet to become the sheikh, coordinated the charity work from his office (Varol 2015). The Foundation builds and funds the schools in partnership with Turkish NGOs, which are called "sister organizations", often founded in the capital cities of sub-Saharan countries. As one of my interlocutors employed in these NGOs informed me in 2017, the Foundation had partners in 23 countries, 13 of which were in Africa south of the Sahara. These countries included, among others, Burkina Faso, Mali, Chad, Niger, Senegal, Ghana, Cameroon, Sierra Leone, Tanzania, and Uganda<sup>6</sup>. There were schools in 10 sub-Saharan countries, the same interlocutor told me, some of which were hosting multiple schools, sometimes in different cities. These schools are of two different kinds: the hybrid schools integrated into the formal education system of the host country and the informal Qur'an schools.

This paper focuses on the first group of schools, which have remained unexplored until recently (Binaté 2019). The silence surrounding the schools of Erenköy Cemaati is in stark contrast to the wide attention the Gülen Network's schools in Africa south of the Sahara have received from scholars (Angey-Sentuc 2015; Angey 2016; Dohrn 2014, 2017; Shinn 2015; Kaag 2017, 2018). Even when the schools of Erenköy Cemaati became subject of academic research, the underlying structure of a *cemaat* that has created and maintained these institutions of Islamic learning remained obscure. In his 2019 article, Binaté acknowledges that the Istanbul-based Aziz Mahmud Hüdayi Foundation, which is behind the schools in Ivory Coast, has affiliations with the Naqshbandi order and is led by Sheikh Osman Nuri Topbaş. However, the presence of Erenköy Cemaati behind the Foundation and the centrality of the *cemaat* to the creation of funds and labor force as well as the content of the teachings escape his analysis.

As a matter of fact, the association of these schools with Aziz Mahmud Hüdayi Foundation instead of Erenköy Cemaati, that is, with the civic associational form of a foundation rather than a religious community springing from a Sufi order, is hardly a misnomer. This is, rather, related to the NGOization of Sufi orders in modern Turkey (Silverstein 2007, 2011; Yavuz 2003; White 2002). With the proscription of Sufi orders and closure of their lodges in 1925, foundations (*vakıf*) that historically ensured the financial sustainability of the lodges took on a new role (Silverstein 2003). In the prohibitive environment of the post-1925 Turkey, Sufi orders continued to exist in the form of *vakıfs*, formally recognized by the government and informally linked to Sufi communities (Silverstein 2003). The political liberalization in the 1980s, as well as the reforms and clientelistic networks of the AKP government since the 2000s have helped increase the number and facilitated the activities of *vakıfs* in and beyond Turkey. These activities mainly center around education, taking the form of schools, dormitories, and scholarships (Silverstein 2007, 2011; Vicini 2013, 2020; Burak-Adli 2020).

Furthermore, the schools of Erenköy Cemaati in Africa south of the Sahara, as this article argues, are the products of the overlapping of the NGOization of Sufi orders in Turkey and the NGOization of education in Africa. With the state disinvestment in public education as an austerity measure imposed by the structural adjustment programs in the 1980s, there

<sup>6</sup> The criteria for choosing a country seems to be the presence of a Muslim majority or minority and, above all, the availability of local contacts and collaborators, whether a public institution as in Senegal or civil society organization as in Burkina Faso.

has been a privatization and NGOization of schooling in Africa (Fichtner 2012; Dilger and Schulz 2013). Neoliberal restructuring has, therefore, paved the way for the diversification and commodification of education by creating a vacuum to be filled by Christian and Muslim organizations in the wake of the withdrawal of the state (Dilger and Schulz 2013). The schools of Erenköy Cemaati in Africa south of the Sahara came into being in the context of the recent proliferation of Christian and Muslim schools with transnational ties. These schools reveal, however, a different dimension of NGOization of education than the transfer of global norms and standards as discussed by Fichtner (2012). By NGOization, I refer to the process by which Islamic schools become a project of faith-based NGOs, which are also engaged in humanitarian, charity, and proselytizing activities. This process, I argue, repositions the African student as an aid recipient from the perspective of the Turkish donors. However, the analysis of individual cases reveals that the NGOization is not an easily legible process. Whereas the school in Dakar seems to fall under the category of a public school, the school in Dar es Salaam is nested within a private Islamic school, despite the fact that they are both funded and coordinated by Turkish NGOs linked to Erenköy Cemaati.

### 3. The Girls' School in Dakar

Erenköy Cemaati entered Senegal's highly fragmented educational landscape based on a protocol with the country's Ministry of Education to renovate the educational units within the Islamic Institute of Dakar and add a new girls' boarding school to the compound. In collaboration with Şefkat Yolu (Path of Compassion) Association<sup>7</sup>, Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (*Türk İşbirliği ve Koordinasyon Ajansı Başkanlığı*, TİKA) constructed the girls' boarding school on the allocated land next to the Institute within five months (TİKA 2013). In addition to the new building separated from the rest of the complex with a garden that protect the female students' privacy, TİKA repaired the existing educational facilities and granted books and school supplies (TİKA 2013). As one of the most prominent state institutions active in Turkey's Africa strategy, TİKA's collaboration with Şefkat Yolu reveals the state–Sufi order–NGO nexus through which transnational educational projects are actualized. Furthermore, it also shows that funds for building schools are generated by the state as much as individual donations of adherents such as Abdullah Bey, discussed below.

The Islamic Institute of Dakar is a public institution that was founded for research on Islamic sciences and teaching of Arabic language in 1974, during the Presidency of Senghor, on the site of the Grand Mosque of Dakar (Hugon 2016). If the institute is architecturally dominated by the Moroccan aesthetics of the Grand Mosque, built with the sponsorship of the Moroccan King Hassan II in 1964 who was present at its opening, the institution has been intellectually dominated by *arabophone* scholars, composed mainly of returning graduates of universities in Arab countries like Morocco, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia. The partnering of the Islamic Institute with a Turkish NGO to design and instruct the religious education within the institute, therefore, represents an important rupture in its institutional history and culture in which Arabic language has been central to the teaching of Islam. While the religious curriculum imported from Turkey and taught by Turkish teachers is an important intervention into Islamic education in the Institute, this partnership is also symbolic of Turkey's emergence as an important religious actor competing with Morocco for the spiritual leadership of Sunni Islam in West Africa.

It was during the presidency of Abdoulaye Wade, who embarked on a series of educational reforms to integrate religion into the official education system by introducing Islamic sciences into public curriculum, establishing public *franco-arabe* schools<sup>8</sup> and modernizing Qur'an schools throughout the 2000s (D'Aoust 2013; Villalón and Bodian 2012), that a program was developed for reviving the Islamic Institute of Dakar. Aziz Mahmud Hüdayi

<sup>7</sup> The French name for the association is La Voie de La Charité.

<sup>8</sup> *Franco-arabe* schools are bilingual schools in which Islamic studies and the Arabic language are taught along with secular subjects and the French language.



Foundation took charge of the renovation with the condition of attaching a girls' school based on the *imam-hatip* model and a protocol was signed (interview, Turkish educator). The girls' boarding school, funded and administered by Şefkat Yolu, started education in the 2011/2012 academic year with the promise of granting official diplomas. Until then, private *arabo-islamique* schools remained outside of the formal education system, their diplomas not recognized. This also meant that the students could not enter the national exam to pursue university education in Senegal. Those who graduated from private *arabo-islamique* schools continued higher education mostly in Morocco, Tunisia, Libya, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Turkey, Iraq, and Iran (Dia 2015). So, among the first cohort of students at the girls' boarding school were those who enrolled in a secondary school for the second time for the sake of obtaining a diploma (interview, Turkish educator). When the new government failed to deliver this promise, students organized a boycott that led to the adoption of a new law in 2013 that permitted the graduates of private *arabo-islamic* schools and *franco-arabe* public schools access to public universities and officially recognized diplomas (Dia 2015; Brossier 2017). As a result of the collaboration between the Islamic Institute of Dakar and *franco-arabe* schools, "Arabic language and Islamic Sciences" were given place within the national exam.<sup>9</sup>

In 2017, there were 66 students in the girls' boarding school in Dakar coming from diverse background, including those from poor families in rural Senegal and those from the rich neighborhoods of Dakar. As in other schools of Erenköy Cemaati, they were not expected to pay either a school or a dormitory fee. Although the Turkish educators in Dakar resembled the girls' school to an *imam-hatip* school, within the Senegalese education system, it falls somewhere between the category of an *arabo-islamique* school, where the language of teaching is Arabic and the curricular focus is on Islam, and *franco-arabe* schools, where a mixed curriculum of secular and religious subjects is taught in French and Arabic.

In the girls' boarding school, the language of teaching for secular subjects such as history, geography, and mathematics is Arabic. Many teachers hired at the Institute are graduates of universities in Arab countries fluent in the language, conforming with the Institute's original agenda for teaching and research. However, the courses on Qur'an and *adab* (proper conduct) are taught in French. This is mainly because the Turkish teachers who teach these courses speak French and not Arabic. Although not part of the official curriculum, students also learn basic Turkish in the school (interview, Turkish educator). In 2017, the administration was working on incorporating Turkish language courses into the official curriculum. Arrangements were made for the Turkish teacher who was on a one-year contract for teaching selective Turkish courses at Cheikh Anta Diop University<sup>10</sup>, to teach the Turkish language at the girls' boarding school as well (interview, Turkish teacher). The school also offers a course of French language and, ironically, the only other courses taught in French are the religion courses instructed by the Turkish teacher who grew up in France. The girls' school can be considered as the only public *arabo-islamique* school in the country, as one of the Senegalese administrators at the Institute suggested. This has to do with the fact that the school is nested in a public institution and that the salaries of local teachers are paid by the Senegalese Ministry of Education. All the remaining costs of the girls' boarding school is covered by the Turkish NGO, Şefkat Yolu.

While this financial and institutional arrangement gives the school the status of a public school in Senegal, the NGOization of Islamic education at the Institute remains obscure. The Turkish NGO, Şefkat Yolu, not only provides resources for the Senegalese girls' education, but also the content of the Islamic education. Furthermore, this is not limited to the religious curriculum and textbooks imported from Turkey. More importantly, it is the Qur'anic education that educators, either Turkish or local, receive in Istanbul that

<sup>9</sup> (Centre National de l'Orientation Scolaire et Professionnell 2020).

<sup>10</sup> The selective Turkish courses at the Cheikh Anta Diop University were recently opened based on a 2016 protocol between Yunus Emre Institute, devoted to the teaching of the Turkish language and culture abroad, and the university. "Yunus Emre Enstitüsü ile Senegal Arasında İşbirliği Protokolü" ["A Collaboration Protocol between the Yunus Emre Institute and Senegal"]. Available online: <https://www.haberler.com/yunus-emre-enstitusu-ile-senegal-arasinda-8386323-haberi/> (accessed on 21 December 2020).

shapes the religious courses and the moral discipline in the boarding school. By spending one to three years at the Qur'an school in Istanbul, the educators are also exposed to the teachings of Osman Nuri Topbaş before they are employed in the schools affiliated with Erenköy Cemaati. While the teachers embody Sufi pedagogies through this training, the directors in Senegal and Tanzania, who were themselves graduates of *imam-hatip* schools, claimed that these schools were modeled after *imam-hatip* schools, suggesting an unlikely convergence of "official" and "unofficial" Islamic pedagogies.

#### 4. Incubating a School for Muslim Students

Like the school in Dakar, the study of the school in Dar es Salaam shows that more than the replica of an *imam-hatip* model, the education follows the institutional and curricular standards of the host country's national education system, while the religious teaching draws on the curriculum imported from Turkey and is taught by teachers trained in the Qur'an school in Turkey. Unlike the school in Dakar, however, the teaching of Turkish was officially integrated into the curriculum and was carried out by public teachers who were officially appointed by Turkey's Ministry of Education in the school in Dar es Salaam. While both schools were coordinated by Turkish NGOs, the one in Dakar was nested in a public institution and the other one was nested in a private Islamic school run by a Sudanese NGO with Qatari funds.

The Dar es Salaam-based Turkish NGO, Rehema Foundation, was established in the early 2010s. Since its own school building was under construction, Rehema was renting classrooms from the Ununio Islamic High School. Meanwhile, the Foundation was constructing a new school with a capacity of 400 students and the name Türkiye İmam-Hatip Secondary and High School on land allocated by the Tanzanian state.<sup>11</sup> The school had over 70 students including 44 female students. During my fieldwork in 2017, 20 male graduates had recently left for international *imam-hatip* school in Turkey. The school recruited Muslim students, but it was not an Islamic school, per se. It followed the public curriculum with two religion courses in which the local teachers trained in the Qur'an school in Turkey taught the textbooks, *Let Us Learn Islam*, that were imported from Turkey. As in the school in Senegal and most probably in other countries where Arabic is not the official language, the language of teaching for religion courses was again not Arabic. While the religion courses were taught in French in Senegal, in Tanzania, they were taught in English. This is related to the fact that, in Turkey, the language for teaching Islam both in *imam-hatip* schools and Qur'an schools is not Arabic, but Turkish. As such, the schools affiliated with Turkish Sufi communities differ from most Islamic schools in Africa south of the Sahara where the language of teaching Islam is Arabic. In addition to the secondary school, Rehema was running 21 *medreses* including at least five modernized *medreses*, meaning offering classes like English and mathematics in addition to the teaching of Qur'an.

The director of Rehema was an *imam-hatip* graduate from Konya, Turkey, and argued that he worked diligently to implement this model in Tanzania. The assistant director of the school was a 2012 graduate of the Zakatala Faculty of Divinity at the Baku Islamic University established by Aziz Mahmud Hüdayi Foundation. He illustrated how the graduates of the global network of Islamic education woven around Erenköy Cemaati become the future employees of these schools. However, the global mobility enjoyed by an Azeri graduate is hardly available for African students who mostly return to their own countries for employment. Like the emerging collaboration with the Yunus Emre Foundation for the teaching of Turkish language in Senegal, the school in Tanzania collaborated with the Ministry of Education for the appointment of two teachers for teaching the Turkish language. Along with them, there were 16 teachers appointed in 2016 to the schools affiliated with Erenköy Cemaati, all in sub-Saharan countries with one exception.

<sup>11</sup> "Üç Kültürün Harman Olduğu Ülke Tanzanya" ["Tanzania, where the three cultures blend"], 28 January 2019, Aziz Mahmud Hüdayi Foundation. Available online: <https://www.hudayivakfi.org/uc-kulturun-harman-oldugu-ulke-tanzanya.html> (accessed on 25 September 2020).

The directors of the NGOs and schools of Erenköy Cemaati in Tanzania and Senegal whom I interviewed were not only themselves graduates of *imam-hatip* schools in Turkey but emphasized that these schools were based on the *imam-hatip* model. While the first school established in Ouagadougou is called Lycée Privé Madina International (Private International High School of Medina) in French, it is referred as Medine İmam Hatip Lisesi (Medina *İmam-Hatip* High School) in Turkish. The stress put on the *imam-hatip* model by the educators affiliated with Erenköy Cemaati is neither arbitrary nor disinterested. Rather, it expresses political loyalty to and ideological affinity with the AKP government. It is also an evidence of the government's shifting alliances with religious communities in the post-coup Turkey, away from the Gülen Network and toward Erenköy Cemaati. A closer look at the schools on the ground revealed, however, that these are not necessarily the replica of an *imam-hatip* model exported as a novelty from Turkey but are rather nested in existing institutional and curricular structures of the host country's national education system. In order to understand how the NGOization of Islamic education articulates with the NGOization of Sufi orders in Turkey, we need to situate this pedagogical project within broader historical, social, and political context.

### 5. Erenköy Cemaati and *Vakıf*-Ication of Sufism in Turkey

The Naqshbandiyya is an ubiquitous Sufi order, spread across the Muslim world with the exception of most parts of Africa (Algar 1996). In the 19th century Ottoman Empire, the Khalidi branch of the Naqshbandi order was the most influential *tariqa* with strong ties to state bureaucracy, the ulama, and urban elites (Yavuz 2003). Gradually losing their autonomy in the late Ottoman, Sufi orders came under state inspection and control as the sheikhs became bureaucrats (Silverstein 2009, 2011). The Republican policies toward Sufi orders were aligned with the late Ottoman reforms until the rebellion of a Kurdish Naqshbandi sheikh against the regime. This led to the adoption of a new law that uprooted the organized religious life with the abolition of Sufi orders and closing of their lodges in 1925 (Silverstein 2011). Rather than the disappearance of Sufi orders, the proscription brought the bifurcation of the religious sphere into official Islam represented by the newly founded Presidency of Religious Affairs (*Diyanet*) and unofficial Islam represented by Sufi orders surviving underground (Öztürk 2019; Sakallioğlu 1996). With *tariqas* being legally banned, *cemaat* (community) came to define the associational form the Sufi orders took under the Republican regime.

Erenköy Cemaati was formed in the Erenköy neighborhood of Istanbul around one of the *halifes* (successors) of the Khalidi sheikh Mehmed Esad, who was arrested with accusations of leading an anti-regime demonstration and died in prison in 1931 (Yavuz 2003; Algar 1996). With the transition to a multi-party system in 1950 and the subsequent relaxation of restrictions, Sufi orders, especially the Naqshbandiyya, began to strengthen their power and influence in political and economic spheres in the following decades. A group of adherents including intellectuals and wealthy businesspeople were gathering in the *sohbets* (conversation-cum-sermon) of Esad's *halife*, sheikh Mahmud Sami Ramazanoğlu at the mosque in Erenköy (Yavuz 2003; Çakır 1990). The post-1980 military coup regime created a more favorable environment for Sufi orders by embracing Islam as a constitutive component of Turkish national identity and the liberalization of associational life. As the following decades witnessed the proliferation of Islamic associations and publications, Erenköy Cemaati further institutionalized by establishing Aziz Mahmud Hüdayi Vakfı in 1985 and the *Altınoluk* magazine and the Erkam publishing house in 1986. Since then, the *Vakıf* concentrated on Islamic charity and education by providing scholarships, building dormitories, and establishing Qur'an schools. With the fall of the Soviet Union, various religious groups from Turkey began to engage in Islamic charity and education in the newly independent Turkic countries of the Caucasus and Central Asia. Erenköy Cemaati was particularly active in Azerbaijan where the country's Spiritual Directorate entrusted it with managing two branches of the Islamic University of Baku in the provinces of Zakatala



and Sheki (Balci 2018). These institutional structures and networks prepared the ground for the rapid expansion of the schools in Africa south of the Sahara.

## 6. The Revivalism of *Vakıf* under the AKP

The legal and ideological framework for the expansion of this particular network of Islamic education was provided by AKP reforms, the revivalism of *vakıf*, and the corresponding shift in state–religion relations. *Cemaat*-ification of Sufi orders in modern Turkey has gone hand in hand with the *vakıf*-ication of the lodge as the locus of Sufi sociality (Silverstein 2007, 2011). Dating back to the early Islamic history, a *waqf* (*vakıf* in Turkish) is a pious endowment or foundation that comprises properties endowed for the permanent maintenance of specific beneficiaries (Singer 2016, 2013). These beneficiaries historically ranged from institutions such as mosques, schools, hospitals, public kitchens, and caravanserai; structures like bridges, roads, and water works; or individuals such as scholars, students, travelers, widows, orphans, and the poor (Singer 2002). In the Ottoman tradition of *waqf* making, the sultans and the members of the imperial family as well as ordinary individuals established *waqfs* for these specific purposes (Singer 2016). Osman Nuri Topbaş (Topbaş 2002) defines the Ottoman as a “civilization of *vakıf*” with 26,300 registered *vakıfs*, including those for healing wounded birds, and laments that the Turkish society lags behind this ancestral ideal. Topbaş’s statement resonates with the revivalism of *vakıf* as Ottoman cultural heritage under the AKP’s hegemony.

In this neo-Ottomanist mode of heritage production, the Ottoman *vakıf* is not only the quintessential civil society, but also an institutional model for collaborative state–civil society relations (Zencirci 2014). Much ink has been spilled on the symbiotic, collaborative, and clientelistic relations of the AKP government with the Islamic NGOs, especially in the context of the neoliberal restructuring of social welfare (Atalay 2019) and foreign policy (Çelik and İşeri 2016). The following discussion contributes to this body of literature by showing how this new model of state–civil society relations unfold in the field of Islamic education within a transnational context. The legal framework of this collaboration was provided by the AKP reforms. The AKP government passed a new law in 2008 that allowed *vakıfs* to participate in transnational activities, form partnership with international institutions, and open international branches (Isik 2014). While these political and legal developments in Turkey paved the way for the rapid expansion of the schools of Erenkøy Cemaati to Africa south of the Sahara, neoliberal reforms prepared the education sector for transnational actors in different parts of the continent.

## 7. Islamic Learning in Africa: Transnational Actors and NGOization

In order to understand how the NGOization of Sufi orders in Turkey articulates with the NGOization of education in Africa south of the Sahara to produce the Islamic schools operated by Naqshbandi groups, we need to look more closely to the global linkages of Islamic education on the continent. Mobilities and exchanges related to Islamic learning have connected Africa south of the Sahara to the Maghreb and the Middle East for over a millennium. Islamic education increasingly continued to be a conduit for transregional flows of people and ideas during and especially after colonialism. With decolonization, Nasser’s Egypt set the stage for a new wave of Arab outreach to Africa south of the Sahara that has shaped the field of Islamic education in important ways (Thurston 2016). Attended by students from south of the Sahara for centuries, Al-Azhar University in Cairo became the main actor of Egypt’s diplomatic and Islamic mission in Africa (Ahmed 2001). Since the 1961 reforms, Al-Azhar has recruited ever increasing numbers of students from sub-Saharan countries (Bava 2014; Thurston 2018). North African countries including Libya, Morocco, and Algeria in addition to Egypt remained as the main international destination and funders for Islamic education until the 1980s when, following the oil boom, the Gulf countries like Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Iran entered the competition in Africa south of the Sahara (Ahmed 2001; Kane 2016). Saudi scholarships to study in the Islamic University of Madina, founded in 1961, provided a Salafi alternative to the Sunnism of Al-Azhar.

Returning graduates of universities in Arab countries began to reform Islamic education in West Africa in the 1940s (Brenner 2000; Thurston 2016). The reformists modernized Islamic learning by combining the content of the classical Qur'anic education with the form of the colonial school, therefore challenging the hegemony of both the colonial project of education and the Sufi brotherhoods that dominate Qur'anic education (Launay 2016). While providing Muslim parents who distrust colonial schools with an option for the education of their children, the new hybridized Islamic schools, referred as Islamiyya schools in Northern Nigeria, *franco-arabe* schools in Senegal, and *médersa* in Mali and Mauritania, have attracted external funds from Arab countries (Kane 2016; Dia et al. 2016). Especially in places like Senegal where these private schools fell outside of the formal education system, at least until the 2002 reform, many students, who were not granted diplomas that would allow them to pursue higher education in their own countries, studied at Arab universities.

These private initiatives gained a new momentum in the 1980s with the structural adjustment programs that imposed cutbacks in public spending on education while facilitating the entry of external actors and funders into the field of education through liberalization and privatization (Kaag 2017; Grysole 2018). Structural adjustment, furthermore, paved the way for “educational adjustment” through the development intervention of international NGOs in the education sector (Fichtner 2012). The World Declaration on Education for All, adopted in 1990 in Jomtien, set the goal of universal access to education for African states. This objective was later affirmed at the World Education Forum in Dakar in 2000 and became one of the Millennium Development Goals to be achieved by 2015. While this target put pressure on states to reform the education system, it also mobilized international NGOs to develop projects that would help increase school enrollment and improve learning conditions in existing schools (Fichtner 2012). In the field of Islamic education, this has taken the form of an international campaign led by UNICEF to protect the rights of children enrolled in the informal Qur'anic schools through modernization reforms, most famously in the case of Senegal (Perry 2004; Ware 2014; Hugon 2016).

At the turn of the millennium, Turkey entered Africa's complex landscape of Islamic education shaped by neoliberal reforms, populated by diverse transnational actors and subjected to NGOization, with its own model of hybrid school: the *imam-hatip* school. Besides reconfiguring Turkey as an international hub of Islamic education through government scholarships, as discussed below, there has been a systemic effort to export the *imam-hatip* model to Muslim Africa. This model is promoted at the African Muslim Religious Leaders Summits and during the African religious leaders' visits to Turkey. At the second summit the Muslim authorities of Africa declared that “educational institutions similar to the Imam-Hatip schools in Turkey should be used as an example for schools in Africa and backed with faculties providing higher religious education like [Turkey's] theology faculties” (Ozkan 2014). Similarly, the final declaration of the third summit referred to *imam-hatip* schools and theology faculties as a great achievement and encouraged continued cooperation between Turkish and African states with regards to the development of these institutions. For the religious leaders who sought to modernize institutions of Islamic learning and integrate them into the formal education system, the *imam-hatip* school provides an inspiring model. Its novelty lies less in its hybrid structure of Islamic and secular sciences than in the state control and funding that lead to its standardization across the country. Underneath the appeal of the *imam-hatip* model is, therefore, the appealing model of state–religion relations in Turkey, which is characterized by the Presidency of Religious Affairs, the *Diyanet*. In exporting the model of *imam-hatip*, Turkey is indeed promoting the Turkish model of state–religion relations in which the state controls and funds Islamic education, discourses, and practices.

## 8. The Diyanet and the *İmam-Hatip* Model

Before moving into a discussion of how Turkey fits into the global linkages of Islamic education in Africa south of the Sahara, I would like to look more closely to the significance of the *Diyanet* and the *imam-hatip* schools. The promotion of the *imam-hatip* model is part

of the broader project of promoting the Turkish model of state–religion relations in Africa that is characterized by the *Diyanet*. As a state institution, the “*Diyanet* employs the imams, pays their salaries, organizes religious life and acts as the highest religious authority in questions of doctrine and practice” (Öktem 2012). Today, the *Diyanet*’s labor force exceeds 120,000 imams and other civil servants, and in 2018 a budget of 1.5 billion euros was allocated to it, comparable to the country’s military establishment (Van Bruinessen 2018; Öztürk 2016). *Diyanet* was founded as the reincarnation of the Ottoman Office of Şeyh’ül-İslam in 1924, the same year the latter was abolished (Van Bruinessen 2018; Öztürk 2016; Öktem 2012; Gözaydın 2009). The role of the *Diyanet* at this early stage was to create and disseminate official Islam that is compatible with secular modernity and to legitimize the Republican reforms that were uprooting the organized religious life. As the guardian of the secular regime, the *Diyanet* symbolized the state’s control over religion, which characterizes Turkish secularism as opposed to the doctrine of the separation of state and religion.

In the wake of the 1980 military coup, the role of the *Diyanet* was redefined and it gradually grew into a vast bureaucracy, expanding its services first to the Turkish immigrant communities in Western Europe and later to the Muslim communities of Central Asia and the Balkans in the post-Cold War period (Öktem 2012). The third wave of the *Diyanet*’s transnational expansion, including Africa south of the Sahara, occurred under the AKP rule. By 2010, the AKP government gained full control of the institution and gradually the *Diyanet* became a central actor in carrying out AKP’s policies both domestically and internationally (Van Bruinessen 2018). Ironically, the AKP officials, who saw the *Diyanet* as an institution that infringes upon religious freedom when the party first came to power in 2002 (Mutluer 2018), over time turned it into a fortress of the party.

The *Diyanet* plays central role in the globalization of the *imam-hatip* model by granting scholarships to study at international *imam-hatip* schools in Turkey. These scholarships were offered to 479 students in 2019 and currently amount to 1.359 in total.<sup>12</sup> The *Diyanet* has also established two *imam-hatip* schools abroad, one in Kirghizistan and another in Somalia.<sup>13</sup> As we have seen, the discourse of globalizing the *imam-hatip* model is embraced by the educators of Erenköy Cemaati. In order to understand the political implications of this discursive gesture, we need to contextualize it within the historical development and political significance of *imam-hatip* schools in Turkey.

The globalization of the *imam-hatip* model cannot be divorced from the *imam-hatipization* of the national education system in Turkey. Praised and promoted by AKP, the *imam-hatip* school is an institution of Islamic learning historically specific to modern Turkey. The first *imam-hatip* schools were established as vocational schools for training religious functionaries, *imams*, and *hatips*, in 1924, the same year the classical institutions of Islamic learning, *medreses*, were closed down. While the graduates of *imam-hatip* schools were initially employed by the *Diyanet*, over time, however, the schools lost their vocational character and began functioning as mainstream schools that increasingly appealed to parents who wanted their children to have religious education (Ozgur 2012). Within Turkey’s national education system shaped by secular reforms, *imam-hatip* schools with their mixed curriculum of secular and religious subjects provided a viable option. These schools, originally designed for the state to monopolize religious education and control religious discourse, grew in number in the second half of the 20th century with support from conservative and right parties, thus creating their own independent culture and network of graduates (Ozgur 2012). The community of *imam-hatip* graduates has played an important role in the construction and consolidation of the AKP regime (Van Bruinessen 2018; Ozgur 2012). President Erdoğan himself and many co-founders of the party were graduates of *imam-hatip* schools. Not surprisingly, during the 18 years of the AKP rule, the number of the *imam-hatip*

<sup>12</sup> “Eğitim/Kültür” [“Education/Culture”]. Diyanet Foundation. Available online: <https://tdv.org/tr-TR/faaliyetlerimiz/egitim-kultur/> (accessed on 25 September 2020).

<sup>13</sup> “Eğitim/Kültür” [“Education/Culture”]. Diyanet Foundation. Available online: <https://tdv.org/tr-TR/faaliyetlerimiz/egitim-kultur/> (accessed on 25 September 2020).

high schools grew exponentially, increasing from 500 in 2005 (Mardin 2006; Gökaçtı 2005) to 1,650 in the 2019/2020 academic year<sup>14</sup>. The growing importance of *imam-hatip* schools in the social and political life in Turkey is strongly linked to the AKP's youth and national education policies, which aim to raise the next generation of Turkish citizens as a "pious generation" (Lüküslü 2016). The promotion of the *imam-hatip* model by the educators affiliated with Erenköy Cemaati in Africa south of the Sahara is aligned both with the AKP's education policies and foreign policy toward Africa, as the next section reveals.

### 9. Growing Linkages of (Islamic) Education across Turkey and Africa

The expansion of the schools of Erenköy Cemaati to the African continent needs to be understood within the broader context of Turkey's Africa strategy orchestrated by the AKP government since the mid-2000s and its objectives and practices in the field of education. Although the Eurocentric readings of Turkey's recent interest in Africa reduce it to a compensation for the frustrations caused by the stalling of EU accession negotiations (Langan 2017a, 2017b), Turkey's orientation toward Africa south of the Sahara is rooted in much more complex historical, social, political, and economic dynamics (Guner 2020). The juxtaposition of Africa against Europe within the Turkish foreign policy did not occur in the context of lost hopes in the membership of the European Union. Rather, it did so a decade earlier when the leader of the Islamist Welfare Party, Necmettin Erbakan, visited Egypt, Libya, and Nigeria soon after he was elected prime minister in 1996. Erbakan's diplomatic visit to Africa marked the beginning of a political fault line in Turkey between those who believe that strengthening ties with Africa means a stronger Turkey and those who see it as a threat to Turkey's historical alliance with the West and a betrayal of its commitment to secularism. In fact, Erbakan's visit was motivated by a global vision for building economic cooperation between Muslim (majority) countries (Hazar 2003). This new interest in Africa south of the Sahara as a site of Islamic cooperation was later inherited by the AKP, which emerged from within the cadres of Erbakan's party politics and put it in use as a leverage in the international competition for markets and resources in Africa.

The AKP government carried this combined interest in economics and Islam in Africa south of the Sahara to a next level with its Africa Initiative, known as *Afrika Açılımı*, literally "the act of opening toward Africa". This opening was coordinated on multiple fronts over the last decade: routinized diplomatic visits and business delegations, an embassy boom and booming of destinations flown by Turkish Airlines, and official development assistance and humanitarian aid, as well as summits concentrated on economic and religious relations. In 2008, Africa–Turkey partnership was recognized by the African Union during the First Turkey–Africa Cooperation Summit in Istanbul. The second summit was organized in 2014 in Malabo, Equatorial Guinea, while the third summit is planned to be held in 2021 in Istanbul.<sup>15</sup> As part of Turkey's forum diplomacy, the *Diyanet* organized the First African Muslim Religious Leaders Summit in 2006, which was followed by the second and third summits in 2011 and 2019. While the first series of summits have promised economic development stimulated by trade, foreign direct investment, and construction to African nations, the summits on Islamic cooperation have promised spiritual development, mainly through education.

Education has gradually come to play a central role in Turkey's recent engagements with Africa south of the Sahara, which is reflected in the rapid increase in the number of sub-Saharan students in Turkey by 2.5 times, from 4.532 in 2013 to 11.378 in 2017 (Baydemir 2020). The transnational interventions and influences in the domain of education take multiple forms: offering scholarships for studying abroad, building and funding of schools, training religious functionaries (imams and Qur'an school teachers), and supporting

<sup>14</sup> "National Education Statistics: Formal education 2019'20". Ministry of Education. Available online: [http://sgb.meb.gov.tr/meb\\_iys\\_dosyalar/2020\\_09/04144812\\_meb\\_istatistikleri\\_orgun\\_egitim\\_2019\\_2020.pdf](http://sgb.meb.gov.tr/meb_iys_dosyalar/2020_09/04144812_meb_istatistikleri_orgun_egitim_2019_2020.pdf) (accessed on 25 September 2020).

<sup>15</sup> "Türkiye-Afrika ilişkileri" ["Turkey-Africa Relations"]. Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Available online: <http://www.mfa.gov.tr/turkiye-afrika-iliskileri.tr.mfa> (accessed on 25 September 2020).



education reforms in African countries, among others. First, increasing number of African students have received government scholarships over the last decade. There is a division of labor between the Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities (*Yurtdışı Türkler ve Akraba Topluluklar Başkanlığı*, YTB), which provides scholarships to study non-religious disciplines in Turkish universities, and the *Diyanet* Foundation, which provides scholarships to study Islam at high school, undergraduate, and graduate levels. In 2019, 21% of 4731 YTB scholarship recipients came from sub-Saharan countries, seconding those from the Middle East, which compose 23%, including Syrian students on special programs.<sup>16</sup> With the internationalization of existing institutions of Islamic education, both Turkey's significance as a destination for religious studies and the *Diyanet's* role in international education have increased in unprecedented ways. In 2006, the first international *imam-hatip* high school was established in Kayseri and today that number reaches to nine.<sup>17</sup> The first one of the six international programs for Islamic studies in the country was established within Marmara University in Istanbul in 2007.<sup>18</sup> Toward the end of the 2000s, the *Diyanet* began sending selection committees to sub-Saharan countries for recruiting African students to study at these international institutions with scholarship based on exams and interviews.

Speaking at the second African Muslim Religious Leaders Summit in 2011, the President of the *Diyanet* stated that over 400 African students were enrolled in Islamic studies' programs in Turkey.<sup>19</sup> This number increased to 682 in 2017.<sup>20</sup> The *Diyanet* also provides scholarships to African students for attending international Qur'an schools in Turkey. In 2018, the number of African and Eurasian students enrolled in these schools in Istanbul, Bursa, Bolu, Manisa, and Isparta totaled 529.<sup>21</sup> In addition to these scholarships that bring African students to Turkey, the *Diyanet* funds four institutions of Islamic learning in Somalia, two high schools and two universities.<sup>22</sup> The seeds of these education projects were sown during President Erdogan's 2011 visit to the country (interview with staff, *Diyanet* Foundation). In addition to the institutions of Islamic education in Somalia sponsored by the *Diyanet*, there are 126 school units administered by the Maarif Foundation in Africa south of the Sahara.<sup>23</sup> Unlike the schools of the *Diyanet*, these are not Islamic schools, however. Founded in 2016, *Maarif* is a state institution that carries out educational activities beyond the borders of Turkey. The fact that almost one-third of the *Maarif's* 332 schools are located in sub-Saharan countries reflects the centrality of the continent to Turkey's project of international education.

Both the government scholarships and the *Maarif* schools are important instruments in Turkey's ongoing fight against the Gülen Network and its schools (*Aras and Mohammed 2019; Akgun and Ozkan 2020*). The President of *Maarif* declared that 218 of the Foun-

<sup>16</sup> "2019 Faaliyet raporu" ["2019 Annual report"]. Presidency of Turks and Related Societies Abroad. Available online: [https://ytbweb1.blob.core.windows.net/files/2020/2020Raporlar/2019%20FAAL%C4%B0YET%20RAPORU\\_WEB\\_-5e60b9bf7136e.pdf](https://ytbweb1.blob.core.windows.net/files/2020/2020Raporlar/2019%20FAAL%C4%B0YET%20RAPORU_WEB_-5e60b9bf7136e.pdf) (accessed on 25 September 2020).

<sup>17</sup> "Uluslararası Imam Hatip Lisesi Burs Programı Başvuru Kılavuzu" ["International Imam Hatip High School Scholarship Program Application Guidelines"]. Available online: [https://diyanetburslari.tdv.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/lise\\_klavuz\\_tumdiller.pdf](https://diyanetburslari.tdv.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/lise_klavuz_tumdiller.pdf) (accessed on 25 September 2020).

<sup>18</sup> "Uluslararası İlahiyat Programı Tanıtım Ve Başvuru Kılavuzu" ["International Theology Program Application Guidelines"]. Available online: <https://disiliskiler.diyamet.gov.tr/Documents/ÜİP%20PROGRAM%202020%20ONAY.pdf> (accessed on 25 September 2020).

<sup>19</sup> "Afrika Dini Liderler Zirvesi Sonuç Bildirgesinde Barış ve Huzur Vurgusu" ["Emphasis of Peace and Calm at the African Religious Leaders Summit Declaration"]. Available online: <https://www.haberler.com/afrika-dini-liderler-zirvesi-sonuc-bildirgesinde-3147646-haberi/> (accessed on 25 September 2020).

<sup>20</sup> "2017 Faaliyet Raporu" ["2017 Annual Report"]. Diyanet Foundation. Available online: <https://tdvmedia.blob.core.windows.net/tdv/MedyaOdas%C4%B1/Raporlar/TDV%20-%20Faaliyet%20Raporu%20-%202017.pdf> (accessed on 25 September 2020).

<sup>21</sup> "2018 Faaliyet Raporu" ["2018 Annual Report"]. Presidency of Religious Affairs. Available online: <https://stratejigelistirme.diyamet.gov.tr/Documents/2018%20İdare%20Faaliyet%20Raporu.pdf> (accessed on 25 September 2020).

<sup>22</sup> "2019–2020 Projeler: Eğitim ve Kültür Hizmetleri" ["2019–2020 Projects: Education and Culture Services"] Diyanet Foundation. Available online: <https://tdv.org/tr-TR/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/TDV-2019-2020-egitim-projeleri-katalog.pdf> (accessed on 25 September 2020).

<sup>23</sup> "Dünyada Türkiye Maarif Vakfı" ["Maarif Foundation in the World"]. The Maarif Foundation. Available online: <https://turkiyemaarif.org/page/42-dunyada-tmv-16> (accessed on 25 September 2020).



dation's schools were taken over from the Gülen Network.<sup>24</sup> This number includes the schools in Senegal (3000-student capacity) whose transfer cost Turkey \$7.5 million worth of compensation, of which \$2.5 million was paid in 2017.<sup>25</sup> With a high volume of Turkish investments in Senegal and high numbers of undocumented Senegalese immigrants in Turkey, the Turkish government had more bargaining power in Senegal in comparison to some other African countries. For instance, the Gülen schools in Tanzania, while taking regular post-coup security measures such as replacing the Turkish administration with the locals, remained intact, operating in the same building with the same name as of today. Moreover, these remaining schools became an anchor for the growing Turkish political exiles in Africa. As this article argues, state institutions are not alone in their endeavor of replacing Gülen schools that are now associated with terrorism with "legitimately Turkish" schools. The schools of Erenköy Cemaati complement the Turkish government's anti-Gülen campaign on the continent. The collaborations between state institutions and the NGOs affiliated with Erenköy Cemaati in the field of education provide further insight into the reconfiguration of state–religion relations under the AKP's hegemony.

### 10. The Schools of Erenköy Cemaati as Fruits of Collaborations with State Institutions

There are multiple forms of collaboration between the Turkish state and the NGOs linked to Erenköy Cemaati that are documented and undocumented. First, the international students' enrollment in the Qur'an schools in Turkey is the fruit of the *vakıf*-cum-Sufi orders' collaboration with the *Diyanet*. Since the 1991 reform, international students, mainly from the post-Soviet Turkic countries, can study in the Qur'an schools of the *Diyanet*.<sup>26</sup> The *Diyanet* funds only some of these international students, whose numbers amounted to 13,691 in the 2017/2018 academic year<sup>27</sup>. "The accommodation and living costs of an important portion of the [international] students brought by the Presidency of Religious Affairs (*Diyanet*) for Qur'an education are taken care of by [Aziz Mahmud Hüdayi Foundation]" (Ergül 2005). The legal framework and material infrastructure for the creation of a local labor force to be employed at the NGOs, schools, and *medreses* affiliated with Erenköy Cemaati are thus created by the *Diyanet*.

In return, a less formal collaboration between the NGOs and the *Diyanet* occurs in the selection process for the *Diyanet* scholarships. The NGOs help spread the word for these scholarships and have their students participate in the competition for scholarships to study in Turkey. The students of these schools have more advantage compared to those of other schools in the selection process. The Islamic knowledge and familiarity with the Turkish language and culture, with which the schools equip the students, make them more likely to pass the written exam and especially the interviews conducted by the traveling selection committees of the *Diyanet* and the Ministry of Education. For instance, when the *Diyanet* committee arrived in Dar es Salaam for the first time in 2014, they selected 16 students from the school discussed above to study in the International Mevlana İmam-Hatip High School in Konya (interview, Turkish educator). The following year, 12 new graduates of the school received the same scholarship, followed by the selection of 10 male and five female students in 2016 (interview, Turkish educator). Therefore, schools affiliated with Erenköy Cemaati in Africa pave the way for their graduates' continued education in Turkey with government scholarships.

<sup>24</sup> "FETÖ'nün yurt dışındaki 218 okulu Maarif Vakfı'nda," ["FETÖ's 218 schools abroad are now Maarif Foundation's"], Esin Işık, 16 July 2019, Anadolu Agency. Available online: <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/turkiye/fe-tonun-yurt-disindaki-218-okulu-maarif-vakfinda/1533402> (accessed on 25 September 2020).

<sup>25</sup> (Matteo 2017).

<sup>26</sup> "Kur'an Kursları Yurt Dışı Misafir Öğrenci Öğretim Programı" ["Qur'an Schools International Visiting Students Education Program"]. Presidency of Religious Affairs. Available online: <https://egitimhizmetleri.diyamet.gov.tr/detay/475/kur\T1\textquoterightan-kurslar%C4%B1-yurt-d%C4%B1%C5%9F%C4%B1-misafir-%C3%B6%C4%9Frenci-%C3%B6%C4%9Fretim-program%C4%B1> (accessed on 25 September 2020).

<sup>27</sup> "Kur'an Kursları Yurt Dışı Misafir Öğrenci Öğretim Programı" ["Qur'an Schools International Visiting Students Education Program"]. Presidency of Religious Affairs. Available online: <https://egitimhizmetleri.diyamet.gov.tr/detay/475/kur\T1\textquoterightan-kurslar%C4%B1-yurt-d%C4%B1%C5%9F%C4%B1-misafir-%C3%B6%C4%9Frenci-%C3%B6%C4%9Fretim-program%C4%B1> (accessed on 25 September 2020).

Furthermore, Aziz Mahmud Hüdayi Foundation collaborated with the Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities (YTB) for the publication of teaching materials. In the 2014/2015 academic year, YTB funded the publication of 119,500 copies of 53 different textbooks in seven languages to be distributed in 19 countries.<sup>28</sup> The religious curriculum of the schools is, therefore, exported from Turkey and is based on the same content as the Qur'an schools where the teachers are trained in Turkey. After all, in the classrooms in Africa south of the Sahara, this content is taught by teachers who have already completed Qur'anic education in the schools in Turkey, as mentioned before. The textbooks assigned in the religion courses, *Let Us Learn Islam*, ranging from sixth to 10<sup>th</sup> grade, are published by the *cemaat's* publishing house, Erkam Yayınları, in English and French and in three versions for the Maliki, Hanafi, and Shafi schools of Sunni Islam.

While these collaborations have so far escaped scrutiny, the allocation of state resources to Erenköy Cemaati for educational purposes domestically came to the attention of the Turkish public in 2019. The controversy over Aziz Mahmud Hüdayi Foundation and the state sponsorship of its educational complexes emerged when the newly elected mayor of Istanbul, Ekrem İmamoğlu, halted the protocols between the Istanbul Municipality and faith-based organizations. İmamoğlu is the first mayor of Istanbul elected from an opposition party since the AKP came to power in 2002.<sup>29</sup> Throughout the 15 years of AKP hegemony in Istanbul metropolitan municipality, a new mechanism of resource transfer from the municipality budget to pro-government civil society organizations was institutionalized and consolidated. The new mayor was elected with the promise of scrutinizing and democratizing the municipality's redistributive mechanisms and within months turned in a list of faith-based organizations that received most state funds. With 11.1 million Turkish Liras (\$1.5 million), Aziz Mahmud Hüdayi Foundation ranked third on the list.<sup>30</sup> The Foundation released a statement rejecting the accusations of receiving any financial resources, and declaring that it merely used the buildings granted by the municipality as dormitories.

In Africa south of the Sahara, the most well-known collaboration between Erenköy Cemaati and the state has been the Ottoman-style mosque complex in Accra, Ghana, that Aziz Mahmud Hüdayi Foundation has been constructing since 2012 in collaboration with the *Diyanet*, which will be the largest mosque in West Africa when it is completed. Overshadowed by debates on Turkey's mosque diplomacy,<sup>31</sup> is the *imam-hatip* high school and the dormitory for training Ghanaian religious functionaries that the complex will include.<sup>32</sup> As the following discussion will reveal, in addition to the state resources, the educational project of Erenköy Cemaati is supported by donations of the adherents.

## 11. Pious Donors and the Funding of the Schools

On a snowy morning in Konya, Turkey, I walked into a *site*, or a gated community, composed of identical gray and tall buildings. Belonging to an earlier era of urbanization, this barely gated *site* was in stark contrast to the new generation of *sites* that are highly technologized, surveilled, and securitized. As I entered the office, I found myself facing a wall covered with tiles that represent a tropical sunset landscape with two coconut trees. Coupled with the tacit knowledge that the tea must be boiling in the kitchen, a sensation of warmth penetrated my body. This office was home to two separate yet related activities:

<sup>28</sup> "Aziz Mahmud Hüdayi Vakfı". Available online: [https://www.hudayivakfi.org/images/download/hudayivakfi\\_brosuru.pdf](https://www.hudayivakfi.org/images/download/hudayivakfi_brosuru.pdf) (accessed on 25 September 2020).

<sup>29</sup> Since Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's election as the mayor of Istanbul in 1994, Ekrem İmamoğlu has in fact been the first mayor to be elected from outside of an Islamist party.

<sup>30</sup> "İBB; Ensar, TÜRGEV ve TÜGVA'nın musluğunu kesti!" [Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality cut the TÜRGEV and TÜGVA's budget"], 27 August 2019, *Birgün*. Available online: <https://www.birgun.net/haber/ibb-ensar-turgev-ve-tugva-nin-muslugunu-kesti-266365> (accessed on 25 September 2020).

<sup>31</sup> (Beck 2019).

<sup>32</sup> "Akra Furkan Külliyesi" [The Accra Furkan Complex]. Available online: <http://www.acrafurqan.com/tr/akrafurkan-kulliyesi.html> (accessed on 25 September 2020).

the management of the *site* and the charity work of a local *vakıf*. It is not uncommon for contemporary Turkey, where businessmen who establish *vakıfs* or associations, the two legal categories of NGOs in Turkey (Walton 2017), integrate the workings of their business and philanthropic activities mainly by assigning their secretaries the responsibility to coordinate communications and logistics on behalf of the NGO. In such cases, most or all the workforce is voluntary or quasi-voluntary even when the projects undertaken have transnational reach. In these cases, like the creation of voluntary labor, creation of funds is strongly intertwined with the founder's business, which allows him to draw donations from his social and professional network. The *site* erected and the *vakıf* established by Abdullah Bey within its boundaries represented such an entanglement. Abdullah Bey was a construction engineer who economically prospered by building houses for the emerging middle classes of Konya. As a devout member of the Sufi community in Konya, he later founded a *vakıf* whose projects expanded from the confines of the city to Africa south of the Sahara.

Known by its conservatism by some and its charitable culture by others, Konya is a regional industrial hub located in central Anatolia and the second most important city for Erenköy Cemaati. One of the *halifes* of Mahmut Sami Ramazanoğlu, the founding sheikh of Erenköy Cemaati, was Tahir Büyükkörükçü, whom the *Diyanet* appointed as the *mufti* (Islamic legal authority) of Konya in 1965 (Varol 2015; Çakır 1990). A well-respected local religious leader, Büyükkörükçü became the deputy of Konya from Erbakan's National Salvation Party after his retirement in 1977.<sup>33</sup> He also bought land and built himself a house in an inhabited district of Konya in the 1970s, where he spent his retired years until his death in 2011.<sup>34</sup> This neighborhood is named Erenköy after the *cemaat's* place of origin, spatially mapping Büyükkörükçü's spiritual lineage to Mahmut Sami Ramazanoğlu, who resided and preached in Erenköy, Istanbul. In Konya, there is also an *imam-hatip* high school that is named after Mahmut Sami Ramazanoğlu.

Abdullah Bey was a wealthy member of this spiritual community that valued charitable giving as a devotional practice. As expected from someone in his social position, he established a *vakıf* (foundation) in 2012 to respond to the needs of the poor and support the religious education of the youth in his city. In Africa, the *vakıf* was initially engaged in activities like sacrificing animals and distributing the meat as well as drilling water wells. During his trip to Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, with Osman Nuri Topbaş, Abdullah Bey visited the Private Madina High School. Impressed by Erenköy Cemaati's investment in education in Africa, he decided to contribute to the expansion of the *cemaat's* schools on the continent by building a new school in Bamako, Mali. Wearing his two hats as a construction engineer and a philanthropist, he took the responsibility of constructing the school building with his own funds. Built in late 2000s, the school is called Lycée Privé Madina in Mali, whereas in Turkey it is referred as Medine (Erkek) İmam-Hatip Lisesi. It is attached to the Bamako-based La Fondation de solidarite et d'aide au peuple Malien (The Foundation for Solidarity and Aid to Malian People, FOSAPMA), while the schools in Ouagadougou are run by La Fondation de solidarite et d'aide au peuple africain (The Foundation for Solidarity and Aid to African People, FOSAPA). Both of these Turkish NGOs partner with Aziz Mahmud Hudayi Foundation for their humanitarian, educational, and charity projects. It is, thus, a constellation of faith-based NGOs orbiting around Erenköy Cemaati that weaves Istanbul and Konya to Ouagadougou, Bamako, Dakar, and Dar es Salaam. Furthermore, the financial flows between these local NGOs are mediated by the spiritual linkages between wealthy adherents and *sheikhs* and *halifes*. The school constructed by Abdullah Bey in Bamako shows the centrality of the Sufi sociality to the creation of funds for this transnational educational project.

<sup>33</sup> "Tahir Büyükkörükçü 1966–1970". Presidency of Religious Affairs. Available online: <https://konya.diyamet.gov.tr/sayfalar/contentdetail.aspx?ContentId=90&MenuCategory=Kurumsal> (accessed on 25 September 2020).

<sup>34</sup> "Erenköy'e ilk tuğlayı Hocaefendi koydu" [*Hocaefendi* put the first brick of Erenköy"]. *Merhaba*. Available online: <https://www.merhabahaber.com/erenkoye-ilk-tuglayi-hocaefendi-koydu-40592h.htm> (accessed on 25 September 2020).

## 12. Teachers' Training: Fasl-ı Bahar Qur'an School

In addition to the creation of funds, the centrality of the *cemaat* to this transnational educational project becomes clear in the creation of the labor force and in the teachings transmitted through them, as mentioned before. The most important commonality between the schools in Senegal and Tanzania, as well as other countries, is the teachers' training program in Turkey. Before hiring employees, the NGOs in Africa require the candidates to attend one of the international Qur'an schools in Istanbul. All the female teachers I met in Senegal and Tanzania attended Fasl-ı Bahar, which is the only girls' Qur'an school in Istanbul to recruit African nationality students. Not all those who study in the Qur'an schools with scholarship are necessarily hired, but all the local employees have to have this basic training before they are hired. They then disseminate the Islamic teaching they received in Turkey in the schools in Africa. Qur'an schools are not strictly institutions of teachers' training, per se, but within the global network of Islamic learning this is one crucial function they fulfill. Şefkat Yolu in Senegal recruited exclusively female students to study in Istanbul, whereas Rehema in Tanzania recruited both genders. Male students studied in İlem Akademi where they receive professional training such as computer or office management in addition to religious education and Turkish language. Several young Tanzanian men who underwent this education were employed at Rehema's office. Based on interviews with teachers in Senegal and Tanzania, the following discussion reveals the centrality of the Sufi structure to the content of teaching in the schools in Africa, in other words, the significance of Erenköy Cemaati for the school network, albeit overshadowed by Aziz Mahmud Hüdayi Foundation.

Samiha is a Tanzanian woman who worked as an educator with Rehema in Dar es Salaam after completing an academic year in Fasl-ı Bahar. As soon as she saw the call for applications to the Qur'anic education in Istanbul in a WhatsApp group, she quit her job as a public relations officer. As a practicing Muslim who never received any religious education, Samiha thought this to be the perfect opportunity. The female students who were selected to study in Turkey first had to attend the compulsory "camp" in Dar es Salaam in preparation for the education they would receive in Istanbul. Leading the "camp", the wife of Rehema's director was responsible for the young Tanzanian women's orientation. Samiha remembered the eight months she spent in the camp as one of deep confusion:

During this time, we heard so much about this Sufism and I think it was a very new term for us, for all of us. Because every time the *abla* (elder sister) of that time, I mean the wife of the chairman of that time, she was so much insisting about Sufism, and all that to do with the Osman Topbaş sheikh, yeah. So, one day one student actually came to show us about all that Sufism. It was all new term to all of us. We didn't have any idea of what it is, watching on YouTube, nobody is telling us the correct information. We were very confused.

The confusion and doubt Samiha and her fellow Tanzanian students felt at their first encounter with Sufism and the teachings of Topbaş lent itself to a more positive experience during their stay in the Qur'an school in Istanbul. Attending the *sohbets* of Osman Nuri Topbaş twice a week, they developed a better understanding of Sufism and his teachings:

Once we got to Turkey, they taught us about Sufism and it was all different thing from what we heard. Sufism is all about the purification of the heart, you know. ( . . . ) I met Osman Topbaş, *mashallah*, he's a very great man. The guy is all about the purification of the heart, nothing else, you know, the lectures and everything. Every single lecture from his mouth is strictly from Qur'an and Sunna, no exaggeration, nothing.

In addition to *sohbets*, students were exposed to the books written by Topbaş, which Samiha told me were composed of 95% of knowledge of Qur'an and Islam and 5% of wisdom and interpretation. Having internalized the teachings through *sohbets*, books, and courses on *tajwid* (recitation of the Qur'an), *sira* (biography of the Prophet), *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence), and *adab* (proper conduct), among others, the teachers later disseminate

this knowledge in the schools, dormitories, and *medreses* affiliated with Erenköy Cemaati in Africa south of the Sahara. This Sufi content is what makes Erenköy Cemaati a neglected, yet central, actor for the schools known for their connection to Aziz Mahmud Hüdayi Foundation. It is also what makes these schools different from an *imam-hatip* whose curriculum is not shaped by Sufi Islam.

### 13. Conclusions

In the classrooms and dormitories of the schools affiliated with Erenköy Cemaati, Samiha and other teachers who have undergone Qur'anic education in Turkey teach their African students the knowledge, values, and conduct to which they were exposed through the Islamic courses, Sufi sociality, and the *sohbets* of Osman Nuri Topbaş during their scholarship. This article argued that the discourses about the spread of the model of *imam-hatip* schools obscure the dissemination of the teachings of Topbaş and the Sufi Islam represented by Erenköy Cemaati in the schools in Africa south of the Sahara. This transnational project of Islamic education is further rendered illegible by the association of the schools with Aziz Mahmud Hüdayi Foundation, obscuring the relevance of the structure of *cemaat* to the project as a whole. This analysis has revealed the centrality of Erenköy Cemaati to the creation of funds and labor force as well as the content and circulation of the Islamic teachings. More than a misconceptualization, the trading of a *cemaat* with a *vakıf*, or a foundation, stems, however, from the historical conditions that have produced the *cemaat*-ification and *vakıf*-ification of Sufi orders in modern Turkey (Silverstein 2011). The schools in Africa south of Sahara, as this analysis has shown, is the effect of the NGOization of Sufi orders in response to earlier state repression in Turkey and the NGOization of education in the wake of the neoliberal restructuring in Africa (Fichtner 2012; Dilger and Schulz 2013). It is, therefore, these overlapping processes of NGOization that have allowed the entrance of the Naqshbandi groups to the complex field of education in Africa south of the Sahara as belated transnational actors.

Furthermore, the expansion of the schools of Erenköy Cemaati in Africa south of the Sahara cannot be divorced from Turkey's Africa strategy and the growing importance of education, especially Islamic education, and the *Diyanet*'s role and responsibility in it. Nor can it be understood without addressing the reconfiguration of state–religion relations under the AKP's hegemony and, more specifically, in post-coup Turkey. As the Turkish government waged an anti-terror campaign against Gülen schools in Africa south of the Sahara and mobilized the Maarif Foundation to take over the schools, its transnational alliances with religious groups shifted away from the Gülen Network and toward the institutions of Erenköy Cemaati. The educators' emphasis on spreading the *imam-hatip* model is itself an articulation of the shifting alliances in the field of education. However, the reconfiguration of state–religion relations goes deeper than replacing one religious group, school network, or educational model with another.

The collaborative relations between Aziz Mahmud Hüdayi Foundation and state institutions, including first and foremost the *Diyanet*, illustrates two historical transformations. First, the analytical division between the *Diyanet* as official Islam and Sufi orders as unofficial Islam that has long guided research on Islam and secularism in Turkey no longer reflects the actual relations and divisions on the ground. As silent partners of the *Diyanet*, Sufi communities, although not legally recognized, operate within the waters of officiality, thus blurring the boundaries of the official and unofficial. These documented and undocumented collaborations reflect the model of state–civil society relations that rest on the idealization of *vakıf* as Ottoman cultural heritage (Zencirci 2014). Furthermore, the promotion of the *imam-hatip* model in Africa south of the Sahara is part of the broader project of promoting the Turkish model of state–religion relations.

While scholars of neoliberalism have studied this model extensively in the context of the restructuring of social welfare, the collaborations across the state–Sufi orders–civil society nexus in the field of education have remained understudied. This article contributes to this body of literature by analyzing the constellation of state institutions and local and



national NGOs that shape a particular project of Islamic education through collaborations in transnational context. Besides the new forms of collaboration between the state and Sufi communities in transnational context, this article suggested that there is a new convergence between state-sanctioned pedagogic regimes and Sufi pedagogic practices, which requires further ethnographic research both in the formal secondary schools on the continent and the international Qur'an schools in Turkey.

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