

Connecting Civilizations?

The Gülen Movement in the United States

Final Thesis Master Islam in the Modern World

Utrecht University

Inez Schippers

0241296

15 August 2009

Supervisor: Dr. N. Landman

Acknowledgements

Respectful thanks to Stichting Islam en Dialoog and the Dialoog Academie (Rotterdam, the Netherlands), The Gülen Institute (Houston, Texas, USA), The University of Houston, Texas (USA), my supervisor Nico Landman, and my family and friends for their support and help with my research and this thesis.

Contents

Introduction	4
Chapter One	15
The ideology of Fethullah Gülen	
Chapter Two	29
The Gülen Movement defined	
Chapter Three	40
The Gülen Movement in the United States	
Conclusion	53
Bibliography	58
Appendix: Interview questions used during my research in Houston.	62

Introduction

*'It is my hypothesis that the fundamental source of conflict in this new world will not be primarily ideological or primarily economic. The great divisions among humankind and the dominating source of conflict will be cultural. Nation states will remain the most powerful actors in world affairs but the principal conflicts of global politics will occur between nations and groups of different civilizations. The clash of civilizations will dominate global politics. The fault lines between civilizations will be the battle lines of the future'*¹

This is a passage from the 1993 article published in the magazine *Foreign Affairs*, 'The Clash of Civilizations?' by the American political scientist from Harvard University, Samuel P. Huntington. The Clash of Civilizations is a theory which, as described in the passage above, claims that the primary source of conflict in the post Cold War world will no longer be ideological or economical and among nation states, but more people's cultural and religious identities. Groups of people bound by certain shared values will get into conflict with the values of other groups. The bipolarity that was characteristic for the Cold War period according to Huntington obscured, hid a fundamental fact about the world's history, namely that, throughout time the largest units of by which mankind identified itself have been, and once again are, civilizations. The countries and peoples who were forced to take different sides during the Cold War politics are drawn back together again. This means that the population of the world can be divided into seven or eight contemporary civilizations based on culture and social structures, mostly revealed through religion.

The civilizations present in the world today are the following: the Sinic, which includes China, Taiwan, Korea, and Vietnam, the Japanese civilization, the Hindu civilization, the Islamic civilization, the Orthodox civilization which includes Russia, Serbia, and Greece, the Western civilization, the Latin American civilization, and maybe also an African civilization. According to Huntington most major scholars except for Fernand Braudel do not recognize a distinct African civilization. The northern part of Africa is part of the Islamic civilization, historically the Ethiopian civilization stands on its own, and because of the colonization the rest of the continent consists of a multifragmented European culture. However currently, Sub-Saharan Africans are increasingly developing a sense of African identity which could in the end cohere into a distinct

¹ S.P. Huntington, 'The Clash of Civilizations?', in: *Foreign Affairs* (Volume 72, No. 3) 22.

civilization.² Interesting for this paper is that religion is an important characteristic when it comes to defining civilizations, as Christopher Dawson said, “the great religions are the foundations on which the great civilizations rest”.³ Moreover, four out of the five world religions defined by Max Weber in his book *The Sociology of Religion*, namely, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and Confucianism, are associated with major civilizations.⁴

Huntington probably hoped that his theory would provide a new paradigm of international relations to replace the existing realist school paradigm which claimed that nation-states led by power maximization calculations were the primary actors in world affairs. It is not possible to say whether his hypothesis is right but several events that occurred in the last decade such as the September 11 attacks, the cartoon crisis in Denmark, the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, have proved that he at least had a prescient vision. Of course the sharp division Huntington makes between the West and the rest, or more specifically Islam, is disputable. Edward Said in his response to the Clash theory states that: ‘Certainly neither Huntington nor Lewis⁵ has much time to spare for the internal dynamics and plurality of every civilization or for the fact that the major contest in most modern cultures concerns the definition or interpretation of each culture, or for the unattractive possibility that a great deal of demagoguery and downright ignorance is involved in presuming to speak for a whole religion or civilization.’⁶

Huntington and Said can each be placed at opposite sides of the academic spectrum, and reality is probably to be found somewhere in the middle. It is interesting to see that within the Islamic religious community the same discussion is taking place. Reportedly, some radical Islamists in the Middle East as well as in the Western world have approved of Huntington’s theory.⁷ Others prove right to Said’s theory and make a significant effort to challenge Huntington by promoting dialogue between civilizations. A Turkish religious movement led by Fethullah Gülen is often used as an example when it comes to promoting dialogue. The Gülen movement launched a civil Islamic foundation to defy the existing discourse of conflict and tries to introduce the idea of dialogue between civilizations on a global level.

The Fethullah Gülen movement, also referred to as the Fethullahci, is an offshoot of the Nurcu, which has roots in the Nakşibandiyya, a Sufi brotherhood of Turkish descent. Firmly organized around its leader, the Gülen movement is reserved or maybe even secretive about its

² The various civilizations as they are described in: S.P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the remaking of World Order* (New York, 1996) 45-47.

³ C. Dawson, ‘Dynamics of World History’ in: Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations*, 47.

⁴ M. Weber, *The Sociology of Religion* (Boston 1993).

⁵ Huntington was inspired by the article: ‘The Roots of Muslim Rage’ by Bernard Lewis.

⁶ E.W. Said, ‘The Clash of Ignorance’, in: *The Nation* (22 October 2001) 12.

⁷ M. Bilici, ‘The Fethullah Gülen Movement and its Politics of Representation in Turkey’, in: *The Muslim World* (Vol. 96, Jan 2006) 1.

internal organization. However at the same time it has developed a significant system of public relations. Having education as one of their top priorities, the movement has developed a network of schools. The first schools were set up throughout Turkey, Central Asia, the Caucasus, and the Balkans, and now they are also slowly expanding towards Europe and the United States. The schools teach their students a curriculum that will help them function in modern society including modern sciences, computing and English. The movement also produces a newspaper, *Zaman*, which is spread throughout the Turkic world in local language versions and in English in the West. Another significant characteristic of the movement are the recorded sermons of Fethullah Gülen himself. In the style of certain American televangelists such as Jerry Falwell, in his sermons Gülen begins weeping and addresses God directly. All those characteristics combined, Olivier Roy in his book *Globalized Islam: the search for a new Ummah* describes the Fethullah Gülen movement as a typical neo-brotherhood.⁸ This thesis will evaluate the movement based on the explanation of a neo-brotherhood as it was given by Roy. His description, compared to others who have referred to the movement as a sect, a cult, or a modern social movement, in my opinion suits this complicated movement in the best possible way.

Neo-brotherhoods

Most neo-brotherhoods or *tariqat* (spiritual paths, whose followers form brotherhoods) have been recently founded or profoundly reshaped. Whereas the creation of new *tariqat* from ancient Sufi orders is certainly not a new phenomenon, the neo-brotherhoods cannot be simply seen as an offshoot of a traditional *tariqat* hence they are shaped along new lines and innovated at various points. Their supposed 'return to tradition' often embodies a profound change in religiosity and corresponds according to Roy to forms of globalization and westernization. In case of the Gülen movement the term *tariqat* was rejected and successfully replaced by the Turkish words *cemaat* and *cemiyet* which has the same meaning as *jamaat* in Arabic which means community. Nowadays the movement sometimes even refers to itself as *birlik*, which means union.

Following this description of neo-brotherhoods, Roy elaborates on the hierarchical structure of such movements and the way they operate. The leader or sheikh of the brotherhood, in this case Fethullah Gülen has also founded the movement and should be seen more as a modern guru than a traditional Sufi master. His devotees enthusiastically propagate his biography. Fethullah Gülen himself writes extensively, dozens of books and booklets on religion and dialogue came from his hand. Another way to reach out to followers and potential followers is through various forms of modern multi media techniques such as websites, printed

⁸ O. Roy, *Globalized Islam: The search for a new Ummah* (Columbia University Press, 2004) 227-228.

media like the newspaper that was mentioned earlier, and television. The followers of the movements are usually recruited as individuals rather than as part of a family tradition. Neo-brotherhoods target individuals who live in a purely non-spiritual environment. They can provide the new seeking follower with a community that can deal with all aspects of life, often comparable with a modern cult, very inward looking and inclusive. Of course it does not have to be this extreme. In his article *'Being Modern in the Nurcu way'* Hakan Yavuz says about the Nurcu movement which is closely affiliated with the Gülen movement, 'The movement can be considered modern in that it espouses a worldview centered around the self-reflective and politically active individual's ability to realize personal goals while adhering to a collective identity'⁹

To become part of the movement, there is no real initiation process. Nor is there gradation in membership. The follower is presented with the collective identity in a discursive way rather than through spiritual exercises. By reading the writings of the master and listening to his sermons which are often video taped, the follower has direct access to knowledge. In case of the Gülen movement, the secondary schools as they are described earlier in this introduction also provide followers with knowledge from an early age. However despite the important position of the leader within the movement, Fethullah Gülen is not regularly in direct contact with his followers. He employs modern technology to reach out to the people without handing over any of his power. A network of organizations inspired by his views reaches out to the people through lectures, activities and education. This use of modern technology bestows upon the leader of the neo-brotherhood a ubiquity which might prevent the movement from falling apart if he was to pass away.

A significant detail emphasized by Roy is the fact that on various English websites the Gülen movement does not stress Islam as such, but they prefer to refer to the universal dimension of their message. As an example he refers to the introduction to Fethullah Gülen's biography on the official website of the movement; www.fethullahgulen.org. This introduction at one time did not mention Islam at all; 'Known by his simple and austere lifestyle, Fethullah Gülen, affectionately called Hodjaefendi, is a scholar of extraordinary proportions. This man for all seasons was born in Erzurum, eastern Turkey, in 1938. Upon graduation from divinity school in Erzurum, he obtained his license to preach and teach. In addition to his contribution to the activities to improve the Turkish education system by encouraging people to open private schools, he is renowned for its painstaking endeavors for the establishment of mutual understanding and tolerance in society. His social reform efforts, begun during the 1960s have

⁹ H. Yavuz, 'Being Modern in the Nurcu Way', *ISIM Newsletter*, 6 (2000) 7; cited in Roy, *Globalized Islam*, 223.

made him to one of Turkey's most well-known and respected public figures. His tireless dedication of solving social problems and satisfying spiritual needs have gained him a considerable number of followers throughout the world. Though simple in outward appearance, he is original in thought and action. He embraces all humanity, and is deeply averse to unbelief, injustice, and deviation. His belief and feelings are profound, and his ideas and approach to problems are both wise and rational. A living model of love, ardor, and feeling, he is extraordinarily balanced in his thoughts, acts and treatment of matters. "Whenever I see a leaf fall from its branch in autumn, I feel as much pain as if my arm was amputated"¹⁰

This quotation of course gives a colored and nonobjective image of Fethullah Gülen. However it also gives a pretty clear view on the main ideology that will be described in this thesis, namely the ideology of Fethullah Gülen and his movement. As described in the earlier paragraphs the Gülen movement has spread throughout the Turkic world and also the West in the previous decades. Preaching dialogue the movement is supposedly trying to build a bridge between the various civilizations which were supposed to be clashing according to the previously described theory of Samuel Huntington.

Doubts and critics

The colored and nonobjective image portrayed by the movement itself on websites, in articles, and in books is doubted and criticized from various sides. Rachel Sharon-Krespin, director of the Turkish Media Project at the Middle East Research Institute (MEMRI) in Washington DC, clearly opposes the movement in her article 'Fethullah Gülen's Grand Ambition Turkey's Islamist Danger'. She describes it as follows: 'A shadowy Islamist sect led by the mysterious Hocaefendi (master lord) Fethullah Gülen; the sect often bills itself as a proponent of tolerance and dialogue but works toward purposes quite the opposite'¹¹ She denounces the claims of the movement that they are not after political power and claims that they do not only want to influence government but also want to become the government. She notes several examples of cases in which was proved that the Gülen movement is not as peaceful and tolerant as they claim to be. First she describes how several countries in Central Asia have taken measures against the Gülen educational institutions. Uzbekistan has banned the schools because they supposedly promoted Islamic law. Moreover Russia has not only taken steps against the Gülen schools but against the Nur movement as a whole. Realizing that Russia and Uzbekistan are not known for their pluralism she also elaborates on developments in the Netherlands where the government

¹⁰ Introduction to Fethullah Gülen's biography on the website www.fethullahgulen.org, cited in: Idem, 225.

¹¹ R. Sharon-Krespin, 'Fethullah Gülen's grand Ambition Turkey's Islamist Danger', in: *Middle East Quarterly* (Winter 2009) 55.

agreed to cut several million euros in government funding for organizations affiliated with the Gülen movement such as the boarding schools.¹²

Although this article by Sharon-Krespin is somewhat indiscriminate at some points, her critique on the movement does not stand by itself. In the documentary on Dutch TV in 2008 which she has used for her article more doubts are raised about the character of the movement. Dutch professor in Turkish languages and culture Erik-Jan Zürcher confirms that the movement certainly has some characteristics which could be associated with a sect. The movement is really closed toward the outside world and its members are claimed for the full 100 percent. He also confirms that the youth especially those living in boarding schools are heavily influenced on the ideological field but also in a psychological way. In the documentary Zürcher also elaborates on the promotion of dialogue and the interest members of the movement have in other religions and modern developments. However he says at the same time the writings and sermons of Fethullah Gülen and his followers show a firm belief in the message of Islam. The word of God is seen as the absolute truth. Moreover, however this is always denied by followers of the Gülen ideology, this firm belief in the message of Islam makes the aspect of dialogue seem as a way in which they try to convert the other.¹³ Significant when studying the various institutions linked to the Gülen movement in the Netherlands is the fact that they all deny any association with Gülen and his ideology. Although their websites and activities imply differently, in 2008 the Dialogue Academy, the Time Media Group, and the Cosmicus School in Rotterdam claim that they are not affiliated with the ideology of Fethullah Gülen. This, according to Zürcher could be caused by their Turkish background and the position of religious movements in Turkish society.¹⁴ However the denial certainly raises questions.

Another person to question the character of the Gülen movement is Michael Rubin, a resident scholar at the American Enterprise Institute and editor of the Middle East Quarterly. In a 2008 article 'Turkey's Turning Point, Could there be an Islamic Revolution in Turkey?', he compares Istanbul 2008 with Teheran in 1979. Gülen's followers confirm his philanthropic intentions and see no inconsistency 'between a secretive, cell based movement and transparent governance' ¹⁵ says Rubin. Hence, too many Western journalists and governments have given Gülen the benefit of the doubt. Comparing the Gülen situation with the Iranian revolution in 1979 he reminisces on the fact that back then the outside world had been

¹² Sharon-Krespin, 'Fethullah Gülen's grand Ambition Turkey's Islamist Danger', 57; Documentary on Dutch TV, S. Altunterim, J. Eikelboom, 'Kamermeederheid eist onderzoek naar Turkse beweging', *NOVA/Den Haag Vandaag* (4 July 2008).

¹³ E.J. Zürcher in the documentary: 'Kamermeederheid eist onderzoek naar Turkse beweging'.

¹⁴ Idem.

¹⁵ M. Rubin, 'Turkey's Turning Point, Could there be an Islamic Revolution in Turkey?', *National Review Online* (April 14, 2008) 3.

clueless about Khomeini's intentions because he had always denied that he was after any type of government power.¹⁶ However there is a great difference between the Shi'a background of Khomeini and Iran and the Sunni background of Fethullah Gülen, therefore this comparison might not be very liable. Khomeini was seen as the hidden Imam on which the Shi'a Muslims are waiting for the Sunni Islam there is no such thing.

Case study: The Gülen Institute in Houston Texas

In this thesis I will describe a specific division of the movement, namely the Gülen movement in the United States. This description will be based on research I have conducted at the Gülen Institute in Houston Texas. This institute has been founded in October 2007 as a non-profit organization and a joint initiative of the University of Houston, Graduate College of Social Work and the Institute of Interfaith Dialogue. The main goal of the institute according to their website is "to promote academic research as well as grass roots activity toward bringing about positive social change, namely the establishment of stable peace, social justice, and social harmony by focusing on the themes of education, volunteerism and civic initiatives."¹⁷ To reach this goal "the institute organizes academic and public events, such as symposia, conferences, luncheon forums and seminars, publishes scientific and popular works, provides student scholarships, faculty research grants, supports visiting scholar programs, and cultural exchange trips."¹⁸ The institute emphasizes that they are inspired by the life and works of the distinguished contemporary scholar and civic leader Fethullah Gülen.

With help of the institute I have been able to get into contact with various members of the Gülen movement throughout the United States whom I have interviewed through email or over the phone. In addition to this I have interviewed various people from the movement in Houston and people who could give an interesting insight from an outsider's point of view. In combination with the literature I have found I have tried to create a clear image of the movement in the United States.

The main questions that I wanted to find an answer to with the information I have gathered, are deduced from the previously described hypotheses. Namely, whether the concept of the neo-brotherhood as it is explained by Olivier Roy in his book, *Globalized Islam: the search for a new Ummah* can be applied on the Gülen movement in the United States? Secondly after analyzing the structure of the movement, I will investigate whether their claim of being primarily an interreligious and intercultural dialogue initiative, and a counterweight to confrontational

¹⁶ Rubin, 'Turkey's Turning Point', 3.

¹⁷ www.guleninstitute.org

¹⁸ Idem.

approaches that regard a clash of civilizations inevitable, is justified, or rather, that it is a smokescreen to cover a conservative Islamic agenda. I have conducted this research with the criticism as it is known in the Netherlands, but as the examples display also in the United States, in the back of my mind.

In order to answer those specific questions it is important to understand the ideology of Fethullah Gülen and the Gülen movement. A description of this ideology will follow in the first chapter in addition to an elaboration on the political and religious history of Turkey. The history of the Ottoman Empire and the specific nature of the 'Turkish' Islam have shaped the development of the Gülen movement to a great extent. Those influences and the development of the movement are worth describing because they create a better understanding of its ideology, its goals and its possible intentions. The third chapter presents the research I have conducted during my visit of the Gülen Institute in Houston, Texas. This research, combined with the other information I have gathered of the movement will hopefully answer some of the questions surrounding the movement.

Research method

The research for this thesis started with a visit to the Islam and Dialog foundation in Rotterdam, the Netherlands. In the previously mentioned Dutch documentary this foundation and the affiliated Dialogue Academy in Rotterdam firmly denied any connection with Fethullah Gülen and his movement.¹⁹ Claiming just to be a foundation interested in the promotion of dialogue, Fethullah Gülen and his movement showed up on their website, the lectures they organized, and in the information they published and wrote. The secretive character of this organization in the Netherlands triggered my interest and made me decide to take a closer look at Fethullah Gülen and his movement, in specific into the way they are organized in the United States and whether the Dutch criticism and questions can also be applied on the movement there.

The people from the Islam and Dialogue foundation were very friendly and enthusiastic to help me with my thesis and were able to provide me with a lot of books, DVD's, and other information on Fethullah Gülen. Moreover, they could also bring me into contact with other people who could provide me with information on this topic. The objectivity of the people and the information they gave me however was doubtful because they were all affiliated with, or published in some way by the movement. Therefore it did give me a good insight in the ideology of the movement and how the followers see themselves but not the objective view I was looking for. Also they provided me with hypotheses for my research and offered me to read the thesis

¹⁹ Documentary on Dutch TV; Altunterim, Eikelboom, 'Kamermeederheid eist onderzoek naar Turkse beweging'.

before I was to hand it in to provide me with tips and assistance. The fact that they were enthusiastic to help me with my thesis of course is great but it also gave me the feeling that they wanted to keep an eye on my research and the information I wanted to publish about the movement.

I really became acquainted with the movement when they generously invited me to join them to a conference in Potsdam, Germany.²⁰ Together with a delegation from Rotterdam I traveled to Potsdam. At this conference various papers were presented on topics mostly concerning the Gülen movement and interfaith dialogue. Almost all speakers at this conference were religiously affiliated either to Christianity, Judaism, or Islam and they all seemed to agree on the various topics. Moreover I noticed that at least eighty percent of the speakers were male. In the audience there were quite a few females. The conference was very well organized and we were even invited to join a Gülen family from Berlin for dinner.

After the conference I started to arrange my trip to the United States. It was pretty difficult first of all to find Gülen related institutions because they all go by different names. Only the Gülen Institute in Houston, Texas was related to the movement by name. The contact though email with this institute went very well and they arranged for me to be picked up from the airport and a place to stay at a university facility.

After a few days in Texas it became clear to me that I had to approach various people in various ways in order to get enough information for my research. Most Turkish people working for the movement in the United States were either in Turkey for vacation or busy. Therefore I decided to create a questionnaire which I sent out to a specific group of Turkish people who work in the United States on behalf of the Gülen movement.²¹ I have formulated the questions carefully not to scare my interviewees away and to get the best possible answers. My contact person at the institute advised me on how to formulate the questions in order not to make people suspicious about my motives. Most people on my list have responded to the questions either over the phone, in a face to face interview or through a lecture. An interesting fact to note is that most people came up with almost exactly the same answers, emphasizing the same facts about Fethullah Gülen, his movement and their means and goals.

I also interviewed various non-Muslim sympathizers of Fethullah Gülen with knowledge of the movement. For those people I formulated questions linked to their religion, profession, or affiliation with the movement. I did not include those questions in the appendix because those

²⁰ Conference organized by the Institut für Religionswissenschaft and Forum für Interkulturellen Dialog e.V. Berlin; *Muslims Between Tradition and Modernity; The Gülen Movement as a Bridge Between Cultures*, University of Potsdam, Germany (26th-27th of May 2009)

²¹ This questionnaire is added to this thesis as an appendix.

interviews were less structured and I used different questions for every interview. Those interviewees were either linked to a university or they were religious leaders. They had been introduced to Gülen usually through interfaith dialogue activities in combination with a trip to Turkey organized by the movement. All the interviewees were positive about the ideology of Fethullah Gülen and the way in which the movement was spreading its philosophy. Some of them were actively involved in the movement's activities by writing papers for conferences, participation in dialogue activities, or as a member of the advisory board.

The information I have obtained from my visit to the Gülen Institute provided me with a clear image of what the movement is about, and how it is organized in the United States. This could be through the answers they gave to my questions but also through the answers I did not get, the people I spoke with and the people whom I did not get to see. Moreover the fact that the movement wants to control whatever information is published about them, has added an extra dimension to this research. I have tried in this thesis to combine all of this information into a solid analysis which paints an image of the Gülen movement in the United States, keeping in mind the criticism I have heard from various sides but on the other hand also having an unprejudiced and independent vision.



Base 505560 (A01410) 4-83

(source: www.lib.utexas.edu)

Chapter One

The ideology of Fethullah Gülen

'O people, we created you from the same male and female, and rendered you distinct peoples and tribes, that you may recognize one another.'(Quran 49:13)

Often described as one of the most interesting examples of liberal Islamist thinking in the Middle East, Fethullah Gülen and his disciples have tried to create a religious-political movement favoring modernism, Turkish nationalism, tolerance, and democracy without giving up religious rules. The philosophy of the movement and its leader has been manifested in countless groups and educational institutions in the Turkic world but nowadays also in the West. The emphasis of most Gülen activities is on dialogue with other religions as the citation of the Quranic verse often used by Fethullah Gülen implies. Part of the world has welcomed the community that has developed under Gülen as a progressive development, a positive voice from the Islamic world, whereas others see him as a fanatic in moderate dress.

A short historical context

According to sources inspired by the Gülen movement their tolerant and liberal view toward dialogue with non-Muslims the Gülen movement promotes, is inspired by the position of Islam throughout Turkish history. The Turks were not forced into Islam but first came into contact with the religion on the frontiers. Because the Turks were Islamized and educated in the borderlands and not in the Islamic heartland, they developed a different form of religiosity. Being taught by, usually Turkish dervishes and wandering mystics they got introduced to a different form of religion. As the Anatolian peninsula got converted and later on became a province of the Middle Eastern Empire of the Seljuks, classical Islamic traditions were gradually imposed upon the country.²² However throughout Turkish history a popular, mystical, intuitive faith of the masses, which found its chief expression in the great Sufi orders or tariqats, flourished at the side of this formal, legal, dogmatic religion of the state, the schools and the hierarchy. In their article 'Fethullah Gulen and his Liberal "Turkish Islam" Movement', Bulent Aras and Omer Caha describe how in contrast to other Islamic movements of their times, the Sufi tradition kept a certain distance from politics. It is this rosy image of Sufism to which they link the Gülen movement. However, Bernard Lewis in his book *The Emergence of Modern Turkey* claims quite

²² B. Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey* (Oxford University Press, London, 1961) 12.

the contrary when he paints a more objective and realistic image of Sufism in the time of the Ottoman Empire. It might be that in ideology the Sufi orders were to stay out of politics however various orders came to play an important role in the Ottoman Sultanate. Because they were so influential involvement in politics became an inevitable consequence for the Sufi orders. And although Aras and Caha state that the Sufi ideology preaches a philosophy there is no place for 'others' or enemies because all creatures are God's physical reflections, the different Sufi orders did not agree at various points. This disagreement often led to bitter rivalries between them, motivated by personal rivalry of their leaders.²³

Religion has always been an inevitable part of the state already in the time of the Seljuks and maybe even more so in the Ottoman Empire. Although the position of Islam varied during the various rulers, Lewis notes that in the sixteenth century when the power of the Ottoman Empire had reached its highest point, the Ottoman sultans did want to make the *sharia*, Islamic law, the true basis of both private and public life in the empire. They managed to give it a greater deal of efficiency than any other Muslim state had accomplished at that time. 'In a sense it may be said that the Ottomans were the first who really tried to make the Şeriat [sharia] the effective law of the state, to apply it throughout the land and to give full recognition and authority to the courts and judiciary that administer it'²⁴ In the eighteenth century the Ottoman Empire was still theoretically ruled by the Islamic law, in practice however already this had been narrowed down to private matters such as family law and ownership. Secular decrees of the sultans at that time were the foundation of public and especially criminal law.²⁵ The truth is probably to be found somewhere in between but Islam and religious law certainly played a significant role in the Ottoman Empire. Even though there might have never been a totally developed theocratic system.²⁶

Islam was not the only religion present in the Empire at that time. Christians as well as Jews, seen by Islam as *ahl al-kitab*, people of the book, were allowed to keep their own laws according to the so called *millet system*.²⁷ It should be noted though that however the Ottoman Empire was tolerant toward the ahl al-kitab, and Jews and Christians could live in peace and

²³ Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey*, 400; B. Aras, O. Caha, 'Fethullah Gulen and his Liberal "Turkish Islam" Movement', in: *MERIA* (Volume 4, No 4, December 2000) 2.

²⁴ Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey*, 14.

²⁵ E.J. Zürcher, *Turkey; A Modern History* (London 1993) 12.

²⁶ Aras, Caha, 'Fethullah Gulen and his Liberal "Turkish Islam" Movement', 2.

²⁷ Millet system: Millet is an Ottoman Turkish term for a confessional community in the Ottoman Empire. The term specifically refers to the separate legal courts pertaining to personal law under which minorities were allowed to rule themselves (in cases not involving any Muslim) with fairly little interference from the Ottoman government. Until the 19th century (Reformation Era) beside the Muslim millet, the main millets were the Greek Orthodox, Jewish, Armenian and Syrian Orthodox. Armenians formed more than one (actually three) millets under the Ottoman rule. A wide array of other groups such as Catholics, Karaites and Samaritans was also represented. (source:www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Millet_system).

security, they were strictly segregated from the Muslim part of society. At no point the various religious groups were able to blend into the Muslim society like they were able to do in Baghdad and Cairo, nor did Jews and Christians contribute in any way to the intellectual life of the Ottomans. Bernard Lewis in his book *The Emergence of Modern Turkey* notes that throughout Ottoman history and even in the time of the Turkish Republic it was possible to speak of Christian or Jewish Turks. A non-Muslim in Turkey he writes, 'may be called a Turkish citizen, but never a Turk.'²⁸ Erik-Jan Zürcher also refers to this division but he claims that more recent research has shown that the segregation between the various religions was not as strict as earlier researchers had assumed.²⁹

In the nineteenth century several landmark events took place in the Ottoman Empire on a social, economical, and political level. The 'Sick Man of Europe' slowly lost its international position and territories. However, its state structure made it through and even flourished. Western nations, who would not benefit from the downfall of the Empire, encouraged the Ottoman State bureaucracy to expand its activities and responsibilities. The mounting European influence resulted in a major restructuring of Ottoman institutions. In various Muslim countries Western influence had been rejected, however the Ottomans adopted many Western innovations and considered them to be an improvement. During the so called *Tanzimat* era (1839-1871) military training was streamlined, education transformed, the administration got reformed, the courts got secularized, and the means of communication were modernized. All of this was done hoping that these changes would eventually win the Ottoman Empire a place among the powerful nations.³⁰ Some interesting examples of this transformative period are; the opening of schools shaped by western models and also accessible for women, the development of various reform and human rights programs, and maybe most importantly the creation of a constitution and the opening of a parliament in 1867.³¹

Besides adopting Western influences the modernization of the Ottoman system continued by strengthening the state to resist further European penetration and ethnoreligious rebellions in the Balkan. The primary way to consolidate state power in the nineteenth century was through modernization of the army. The army was transformed into an instrument that could order society in accordance with the needs of the state. The other way to consolidate the power of the state was through the development of the economy via of the introduction of modern

²⁸ B. Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey*, 15.

²⁹ E.J. Zürcher, *Turkey; A Modern History*, 12-13.

³⁰ Ş. Mardin, *Religion and Social Change in Modern Turkey; The case of Bediüzzaman Said Nursi* (State University of New York Press, 1989) 9.

³¹ H. İnalcik, D. Quataert, ed., *An Economic and Social History of the Ottoman Empire 1300-1914* (Cambridge University Press, 1994) 761-763.

sciences and technology.³² When the Ottoman Empire came to a fall after the coup of the Young Turks in 1913 the road to Westernization was inevitable. The revolutionaries saw Islam as one of the main causes of the downfall of the Empire and in order to reestablish the power of the Turks, the new republic had to focus on the west and there had to be a division between religion and the state. This policy of secularism was laid out even further in the 1920's and 30's by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk the founder of modern day Turkey and often referred to as "Father of the Turks". Atatürk strived after the removal of religion from the public sphere and total government control over the remaining religious institutions.³³ His Kemalist ideals are explained by Hakan Yavuz and John L. Esposito as follows; 'In practice, Kemalism became the ideology and practice of eliminating class, ethnic, and religious sources of conflict by seeking to create classless, national (unified as Turkish), and secular (cleansed of any religious sign or practice in the public sphere) homogenized society'³⁴

Secularism became the constituting principle for the new republic. There are two models of secularism. The first secularist model evolved in France after the revolution and is also referred to as laicism. This form of secularism seeks to expand the power of the state and to eliminate or control religion as much as possible. The second model is present in the United States and tries to accomplish quite the contrary. It protects religions from state intervention and it stimulates religious based networks to strengthen civil society. The secularism found in Turkey is based on the first model and attempts to eliminate religion from the public sphere which includes the spheres of education, economics, family, dress code, and politics.³⁵ Society, politics, and economics were restructured in accordance with the positivist ideology.³⁶ This ideology can be explained by a saying of Mustafa Kemal: "Science is the truest guide in life" ("*Hayatta en hakiki Mürşit ilimdir*")³⁷

The integration and submission of religion into the state bureaucracy remained an important factor in Turkish politics in the decades following the establishment of the Turkish Republic. This however did not mean religion had disappeared from the public realm. Islam has remained an important factor when it came to regulating day to day life for the masses,

³² H. Yavuz, J.L. Esposito, 'Introduction ; Islam in Turkey: Retreat from the Secular Path?', in: H. Yavuz, J.L. Esposito, ed., *Turkish Islam and the Secular State; The Gülen movement* (Syracuse University Press, 2003) xix.

³³ H. Schippers, 'Islam, politiek en gevaar van een staatsgreep in Turkije', in: *Internationale Spectator*, Jaargang 61, Nr. 4 (2007) 206.

³⁴ Yavuz, Esposito, 'Introduction', xxi.

³⁵ Idem.

³⁶ Any philosophical system that confines itself to the data of experience, excludes a priori or metaphysical speculations, and emphasizes the achievements of science. More narrowly the term designates the philosophy of Auguste Comte, who held that human thought had passed inevitably through a theological stage into a metaphysical stage and was passing on to a positive or scientific stage. (source: www.britannica.com).

³⁷ Mustafa Kemal quoted in: Idem.

especially in the countryside and the smaller cities. The secularization process imposed from above by the ruling elite had alienated Turkish society from the state. From the 1970's on, the religious part of the population started to organize themselves in political parties.³⁸

A military coup in 1980 changed the situation in Turkey. Throughout the history of the Republic the Turkish military elite had staged several coups when they considered the political developments to be a danger for the stability of the state. The situation in Turkey in 1980 was very unsteady. The population was shattered by ideological polarization and communal violence. Moreover parliament was unable to elect a new president, and the government was no longer capable to provide law and order. Unexpectedly however, the military elite who came into power in September 1980 took several steps to strengthen the role of Islam in Turkish society. Instead of showing secular disregard, they opened new Quranic schools, made religious courses compulsory, and employed new imams. Later on, in 1982 the leading military imposed a new constitution. For the legitimization of this constitution they ironically enough had to depend on Islamic symbols and institutions. Their aim was to further integrate Islam into the state system. A new ideology known as the Turkish-Islamic synthesis was constructed which consisted of elements of Islamic, Turkish, and Ottoman popular culture to legitimize the supremacy of the new ruling elite. This synthesis reinterpreted the nation and its people as a family and a community which was endangered by ideological fragmentation. In the newly created society the nation and the state were cemented together in order to rule out the ideological differences between the various sections of the community. The educational system and the media were used to publicize the popularized version of the new ideology to the masses.³⁹

The changes in Turkish politics in the early 1980's created new opportunities for historically excluded groups within the society. After the intervention of the Turkish generals, religion was not only used as an answer to the escalating violence or to restrain the leftist movement but also as a resource to create a more obedient generation. Religious groups, up till then excluded from Turkish society, were mobilized for the 1983 elections when the state considered leftist forces to be a bigger threat to national security than Islamic ones. Groups such as the Nakşibandi and the Nurcus used this new political opening to activate their indigenous networks. Other measures taken by Turgut Özal, the newly elected Prime Minister, such as expansion of the freedom of speech, association, and assembly resulted in the construction of

³⁸ Schippers, 'Islam, politiek en gevaar van een staatsgreep in Turkije', 206.

³⁹ Idem; H. Yavuz, 'Political Islam and the Welfare (Refah) Party in Turkey', in: *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 30, No. 1 (Oct 1997) 67-68.

an activist consciousness for Islamic movements to shape the new sociopolitical landscape of the country.⁴⁰

The new policies implemented by Özal, along with the introduction and expansion of mass media technologies created a complex type of religious market in Turkey. In this constantly growing market different Islamic movements and orders competed over the 'true' character religion should have in Turkey. The opening of this religious market resulted in the expansion of religious networks in various aspects of the public life such as the economy, the media, and charity organizations. According to Yavuz and Esposito 'The Nur movement of Fethullah Gülen has benefited the most from this political and economic liberalization...Gülen has utilized the ideas of Said Nursi to establish an extensive education system...By using new structural opportunities in the market and society, it [the Gülen movement] has created its own vernacular modernity by directly addressing needs previously ignored by the Kemalist regime and Turkey's state structure'⁴¹

Fethullah Gülen

Fethullah Gülen, by his followers often referred to as *Hocaefendi*, which means the master or higher religious authority, was born in Erzurum, a conservative town in eastern Turkey, either in 1941 or in 1938. He got a religious education at a local religious school and was trained in religious sciences by several well known Muslim scholars among whom, Muhammad Lutfi Efendi. Muhammad Lutfi can be seen as part of the spiritual chain of Islamic scholars that includes Mawlana Jalal al-Din Rumi and Yunus Emre, all three are important Sufi scholars that left a deep and long lasting impression on Gülen. After his graduation in the late 1950's, Gülen was awarded his preaching license and soon after promoted to a post in Izmir, the most modern Turkish city. Due to a combination of his personal talents and the social recourses available in Izmir, Gülen managed to build up a powerful Nurcu derslane network. He did however not limit himself to Said Nursi's work only, but was also inspired by the writings of socially conservative and politically nationalist intellectuals such as Necip Fazil Kısakürek, Nurettin Topçu, and Sezai Karakoç.

During his career, Gülen tried to reach out to as many people as possible. He traveled throughout the country and lectured in mosques, town meeting halls and coffee houses. This enabled him to introduce his ideology to all layers of the population, but especially students and teachers. Yavuz points out in his article *Towards and Islamic Liberalism?: the Nurcu Movement*

⁴⁰ Yavuz, Esposito, 'Introduction', xxv.

⁴¹ Idem, xxvii.

and Fethullah Gülen that the main distinction between the Gülen community and other Nurcu groups was its focus on state-centric Turkish nationalism, the free market and education. Gülen he says 'is the engine behind the construction of a "new" national Islam of Turkey that is marked by the logic of a market economy and Ottoman legacy'.⁴² Gülen retired from formal teaching in 1981. By that time his efforts especially on the educational field already had made him one of the most well-known figures in Turkey.⁴³

The career of Fethullah Gülen did not end at his retirement. Dale Eickelman once referred to him as 'Turkey's answer to media-savvy American evangelist Billy Graham'.⁴⁴ Speaking about Islam and science, modernity, democracy, religious dialogue and tolerance, the importance of education, and current events, Gülen still appears on television, on the internet, giving interviews, and occasionally when his health allows it he has given sermons. In 1999 Fethullah Gülen moved from the Turkey to the United States initially due to health reasons but after being accused of undermining secularism in Turkey, Gülen decided to stay in the United States. Over the years he has build a global network of millions of followers throughout the world and in 2008 he was even voted world's top public intellectual by readers of the magazine *Foreign Policy*.⁴⁵ The meaning of this election will be analyzed more thoroughly later on in this thesis. Because although Gülen's victory seems significant it probably should be seen as his ability to mobilize a large group of voters instead the results really portraying his popularity.

Ideology

Having written dozens of books, pamphlets and articles the ideology of Fethullah Gülen is hard to capture in a few words. It is important to see the foundation of the Gülen movement in the context of religious history throughout the Turkic history. Fethullah Gülen especially admires the 'great' Ottoman history and of course the movement was founded in the turbulent twentieth century, the time of the Turkish Republic. The most important inspiration for the ideology of Fethullah Gülen is the ideology of Bediüzzaman ('Marvel of the time') Said Nursi and his *Nurcu* or *Nur* (Light) movement. Nursi was from Kurdish descent and born in the province of Bitlis as the son of a poor cleric. After his traditional religious education, Nursi became an active member

⁴² Yavuz, H., 'Towards and Islamic Liberalism?: the Nurcu Movement and Fethullah Gülen' in: *Middle East Journal* (53, No. 4, 1999) 593.

⁴³ This description of Gülen's life is based on: A. Ünal, A. Williams, ed., *Advocate of Dialogue; Fethullah Gülen* (The Fountain, Virginia, 2000) 1-2; Fountain Compilation, *M. Fethullah Gülen; Essays, Perspectives, Opinions* (The Light, Rutherford, 2002) 3-4; Yavuz, 'Towards and Islamic Liberalism?' 593; www.fgulen.com.

⁴⁴ D. Eickelman, 'Inside the Islamic Reformation', in: *Woodrow Wilson Quarterly*, 22, No.1 (Washington, 1998) 84.

⁴⁵ Readers poll published in *Foreign Policy* July/August 2008. Other people ending in the top twenty of this election were among others: Egyptian cleric Yusuf al-Qaradawi, Philosopher and Islamic scholar Tariq Ramadan, and Dutch politician Ayaan Hirsi Ali.

of a Nakşibendi Sufi order. He spent a large part of his life either being deported or in prison charged with alleged political use of religion, this gave him plenty of time to write his ideology down. After 1950 the writings of Nursi, *Risale i-Nur Külliyyati* (the epistles of light) were spread throughout Turkey and especially appealed to the young and those educated in Turkey's secular education system. The writings revolved around the idea of Islamic moral rearmament, in combination with the adoption of Western technological and science ideas. According to Şerif Mardin in his book *Religion and Social Change in Modern Turkey; The case of Bedüzzaman Said Nursi*, Nursi was 'a so-called "gate-keeper" of Islamic culture, a cleric, he had a special role to play in these spheres. Said Nursi's writings claim to serve one main purpose: to stop inroads into the Muslim culture of what he saw as the materialism of the West. To combat materialism he engaged in missionary work to revitalize the Muslim heritage of Ottoman and, later, Turkish Muslims.'⁴⁶ The Nurcu movement differs from other Islamic movements in the way it understands religion and its strategy to raise individual consciousness in order to accomplish change in society. It can be seen as a countermovement against the ongoing modernization process based on the Kemalist ideology. Nursi provides a framework for his followers which redefines and revitalizes the traditional Islamic concepts and provides them with the tools to deal with modern challenges.⁴⁷

From its founding the Nurcu movement has preferred print culture over the, until then customary, oral culture. In addition to this oral culture, the writings of Said Nursi became the foundation of a number of reading circles, also known as *dershane*. Those reading circles later on developed into so called textual communities first in Turkey but after a while also in the Central Asian Republics, Germany, and even four in the Netherlands. In those reading circles members would come together to read and internalize the ideology of the *Risale-i Nur*. The *dershanes* have institutionalized themselves by buying homes or apartment floors which could be used to organize reading and discussion sessions but could also be used as a dormitory for university students. In 1999 the number of Nurcu adherents varied between two and six million divided over thousands of reading circles throughout the world.⁴⁸

One of those *dershanes* later on grew out into a large transnational movement with an entirely unique character, the Gülen movement. Gülen transformed the Nurcu *dershanes* into 'lighthouses' (*ışık evler*) and emphasized on the importance of work and education in the transformation process of Muslims and their environment. He considered the economic and moral decay of the Islamic world to be a result of the spiritual and intellectual decline of the

⁴⁶ Mardin, *Religion and Social Change in Modern Turkey*, 8.

⁴⁷ Yavuz, 'Towards and Islamic Liberalism?', 586-589.

⁴⁸ Idem, 590.

society, a problem which had to be solved by means of private and public education. Despite the similarities Gülen's faith inspired education movement is very different from Nursi dersane it originated from. Whereas Nursi was the creator of an intellectual discourse, Gülen should be described as an inspirational leader of a transnational education movement.⁴⁹ This movement can only be understood in the context of Gülen's thinking.

For Gülen, the imposition of secularism by the Kemalist regime as described earlier in this chapter from the top down had created a gap between the society and the governing elite. In one of his books he explains that a good relationship between the government and society is very important; 'Rather than a government saying "My nation," it's more important if the nation says "My government." If the nation sees the government as a host of parasites, it means that the body has long since broken off from the head'⁵⁰ Gülen who can first and foremost be called an Islamic-Ottoman nationalist,⁵¹ prefers the Ottoman model when it comes to relationships between the society and the state. In his redefinition of the of the Ottoman history, the rulers of the Empire were directed by religion but their system of governance was not theocratic. Referring to this heroic history of the Ottoman Empire he legitimizes his own ideology on governance. This ideology states that the main responsibility of this state is to provide its citizen with internal and external stability; 'Politics is the art of managing a nation's affairs in ways that please God and people. As long as a government protects its people from evil and defends them from oppression, it can be considered successful in politics and full of promise.'⁵² The population of this state should not be based on blood or race since Gülen's nationalist ideology includes all peoples with a shared historical experience who feel connected and agree to live together in one state.⁵³ It must be noted however that Gülen in some cases seems to idealize the history of the great Ottoman Empire in order to legitimize his ideology. As mentioned earlier in this chapter various other reliable sources such as Lewis and Zürcher describe the history of the Ottoman Empire in a less heroic way.

Gülen's ideas on government also made him sympathize with the military coup in 1980 since it protected Turkish society from chaos, a situation which should be prevented by any means. Hence, Gülen is not particularly in favor of the political implementation of Islam law and thinks the freedom of expressing one's faith is one of the most important morals to be respected. According to Bill Park in an article on the Gülen movement, Gülen even sympathized with

⁴⁹ H. Yavuz, 'The Gülen movement; The Turkish Puritans', in: Yavuz, Esposito, ed., *Turkish Islam and the Secular State*, 19.

⁵⁰ F. Gülen, *Pearls of Wisdom* (New Jersey, 2005) 87.

⁵¹ Yavuz, 'Towards and Islamic Liberalism?', 595.

⁵² Gülen, *Pearls of Wisdom*, 87.

⁵³ Idem.

Turkey's "post-modern coup" in 1997 which removed the Islamic Welfare Party of Necmettin Erbakan from power. Gülen was afraid that Erbakan and his followers wanted to implement a political form of Islam similar to what we know from Iran, which would influence Turkish political and social life.⁵⁴

A second important aspect of the Gülen ideology is his belief that Islam and modernity are compatible. The fact that Turkish Islam is largely based on the more flexible Sufi traditions had enabled the country to adopt various aspects over modernity such as democratization and a free market economy which are barely found in other Islamic countries. A key to Gülen's thinking is that Muslims should not shield themselves from other religions, ideas or from science or technological development. On this topic Gülen writes; 'Avoiding the positive sciences fearing that they will lead to atheism naivety, and seeing them as contradictory with religion and faith and as vehicles for the rejection of religion is prejudice and ignorance.' Moreover he strengthens his idea by quoting Albert Einstein 'Science without religion is blind; religion without science is lame'⁵⁵ Being ignorant to science and innovation in the past has lead to the economic and moral decay of the Muslim world and progress is only possible when the modern sciences are adopted and promoted. Gülen believes that Turkey should play a leading part in this scientific development of the Islamic world.

Education is another key elements of the Gülen ideology. It is through education that Gülen seeks to adapt Islam to the modern world. It is education rather than politics which should create a change in the Muslim world. The importance of education shows when he says; "The main duty and purpose of human life is to seek understanding. The effort in doing so, known as education, is a perfecting process through which we earn, in the spiritual, intellectual, and physical dimensions of their beings, the rank appointed for us as the perfect pattern of creation."⁵⁶ In order to make this change possible Gülen emphasizes on educational curricula which focus on science, technology and the English language. Religious education on Gülen schools is being replaced by the cultivation of spiritual, moral and behavioral values, of tolerance, respect openness, and the like.⁵⁷ Through his educational system Gülen aspires to transform society from the bottom-up, raising a so called 'Golden Generation' who should dedicate their lives to the service of the people and inspire them to get involved in the movement. In this sense,

⁵⁴ B. Park, 'The Fethullah Gülen Movement', in: *MERIA*, Vol. 12, No. 3 (September 2008) 3.

⁵⁵ Gülen, *Pearls of Wisdom*, 49.

⁵⁶ Ünal, Williams, ed., *Advocate of Dialogue; Fethullah Gülen*, 305.

⁵⁷ Park, 'The Fethullah Gülen Movement', 3.

Park claims in his paper, 'Gülen's mission can be said to be a political project, but one that aspires to achieve its goals indirectly'.⁵⁸

A forth key element of the Gülen ideology is his emphasis on interfaith dialogue and dialogue between civilizations. Meeting with Pope John Paul II in Rome in 1998 and numerous other high-profile Christian and Jewish leaders he has set an example for meetings between religions at a more grassroots level among his followers. Seeking to undermine the "Clash of Civilizations" thesis and to counter the impact of radical or fundamentalist Islamic groups, the Gülen movement supports dialogue activities on a large scale throughout the world. The recognition of other religions stems mostly from Gülen's recognition of the shared theological background of the three Abrahamic religions; Judaism, Christianity, and Islam and the special position those religions have as ahl al-kitab. In addition it should be noted that Buddhism and Hinduism are also involved in dialogue activities because Gülen also recognizes both of those religions as people of the book. As an example of how it could be Gülen often refers to the multi religious and multicultural history of the Ottoman Empire in which diverse peoples lived together in harmony.

A last, often discussed aspect of the Gülen ideology is its relationship with Sufism.⁵⁹ On various occasions the Gülen movement has been described as a Sufi order of which he himself is regarded as the *shaykh*. In response to this accusation, Gülen always affirms that he has not founded a tariqat (Sufi order) and that he has in the past also never belonged to one. However despite the fact that he has never officially belonged to a tariqat, Gülen can at least be described as being inspired by the Sufi theology. As Roy confirms Gülen's opinion and defines the movement as a neo-brotherhood. Those cannot simply be seen as an offshoot of a traditional tariqat hence they are shaped along new lines and innovated at various points. Their supposed 'return to tradition' often embodies a profound change in religiosity and corresponds according to Roy to forms of globalization and westernization.⁶⁰ Moreover in Sufi tradition it was not uncommon especially in the early period not to belong to a specific order. Even Rumi, whom was already mentioned earlier in this chapter as one of Gülen's inspirers was never part of an order.

Gülen describes Sufism as follows; 'As a religion, Islam naturally emphasizes the spiritual real. It takes the training of the ego as a basic principle. Asceticism, piety, kindness and

⁵⁸ Idem.

⁵⁹ Sufism is the generally accepted term for the Islamic mystical tradition. It cannot be seen as one clearly defined religious movement, but more as an interrelated network of ideas and practices, all aimed at a deeper understanding and faithful pursuit of the Quranic message. (Source: T. Michel, 'Sufism and Modernity in the Thought of Fethullah Gülen' in: *The Muslim World*, Vol. 95, No. 3 (July 2005) 341.)

⁶⁰ Roy, *Globalized Islam: The search for the new Ummah*, 227-228.

sincerity are essential to it. In the history of Islam, the discipline that dwelt most on these matters was Sufism. Opposing this would be opposing the essence of Islam'.⁶¹ Gülen understands Sufism as an inseparable dimension of Islam; the one cannot exist without the other. According to Thomas Michel in his article on Gülen and Sufism, it is the ability of Sufism to provide a way in which Muslims can make Islamic faith and practice their own that is of most interest to Gülen, rather than the mystical experiences that come along with the practice of Sufism.⁶² This proves an inevitable connection between the Gülen ideology and the Sufi tradition which makes Roy's explanation of neo-brotherhoods even more liable.

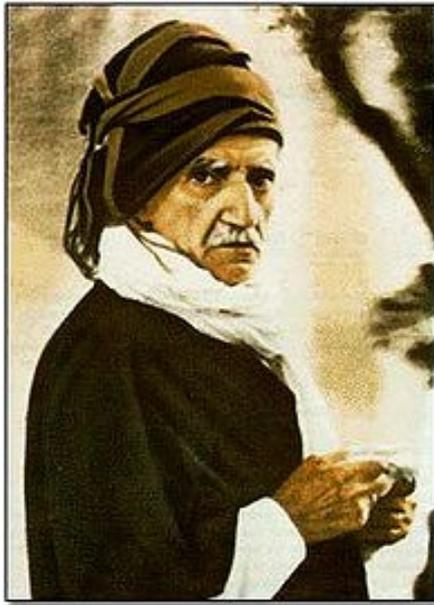
Of course there is a lot more to the Gülen ideology than can be described in this chapter. In his books he describes topics from the position of women, children and the family, to Islamic poetry, to the ideal spirits and people. Some of those topics I will elaborate on in the chapter on the United States. For example the position of women within the movement and in society plays a significant role when it comes to defining the position of the movement within our modern western society.

⁶¹ Fethullah Gülen cited in: Michel, 'Sufism and Modernity in the Thought of Fethullah Gülen', 348.

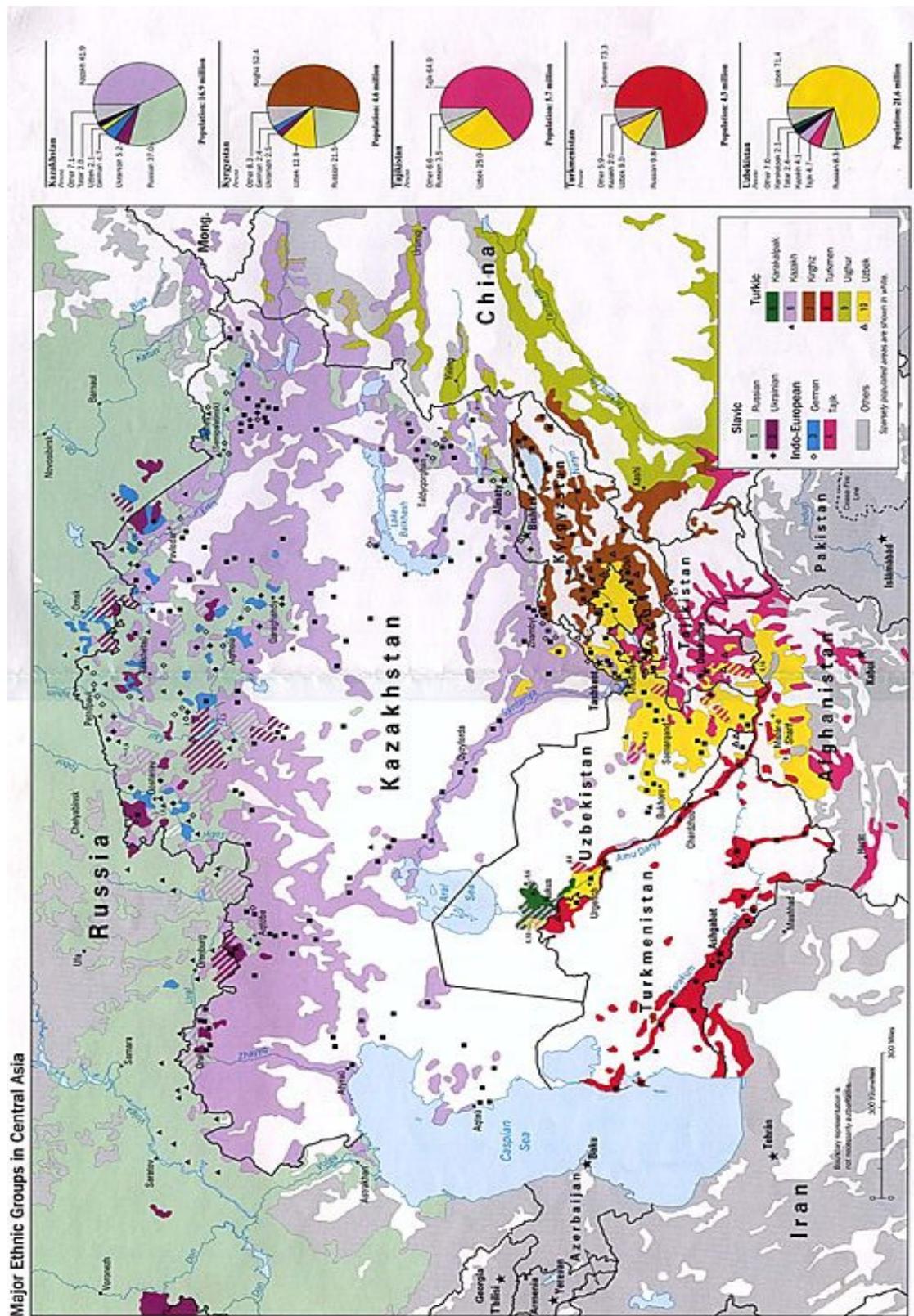
⁶² Michel, 'Sufism and Modernity in the Thought of Fethullah Gülen', 348.



M. Fethullah Gülen
(source: www.fgulen.org)



Bediüzzaman Said Nursi
(source www.wikipedia.org)



(source: www.wikipedia.org)

Chapter Two

The Gülen Movement defined

'Be like a compass:

*Stand firm on one foot, well established in the centre of the circle
and travel with your other foot with people of 72 nations*⁶³

In the beginning this research on the Gülen movement raised more questions for me than it had answers. Not only the complexity of Turkish political history and the comprehensive ideology of Fethullah Gülen caused difficulties, but also the construction of the movement, and the concepts on which the movement is based. Another problem which presented itself going through the literature was the fact that most information was to be found either in books or articles published by the movement, written by people affiliated with the movement, or in papers presented at one of its conferences. An objective image therefore had to be created from a combination of this literature, some independent literature and observation. A brief description of the structure is needed to get a better understanding of the Gülen movement in the United States.

The so called Gülen movement is a civil society movement which started out as a local service group in Turkey in the late 1960's. It was initially composed of a loose network of students, teachers, parents, and small business owners who were inspired by the ideas of the scholar and preacher M. Fethullah Gülen. This religion-based community has now grown into a worldwide faith-inspired educational system with participants numbering in the millions, comprising of hundreds of foundations, companies, professional associations, and formal and informal associations of various kinds. For ease of reference it is now often referred to as the Gülen movement, because the main source of inspiration of the movement is the ideology of Gülen. However, by its participants it is often called *hizmet*, or volunteer service movement, a concept which will be explained later on in this chapter. Fethullah Gülen himself likes to refer to it as "the movement of humans united around high human values".⁶⁴

⁶³ Mawlana Jalal al-Din Rumi, 13th century Islamic poet and mystic quoted in: W.A. Achenbaum, *Serendipitous consequences of the Turko-Islamic Gulen Movement*, Conference paper presented at: 'Islam in the Age of Global Challenges: Alternative Perspectives of the Gulen Movement' November 14-15, 2008 at Georgetown University, Washington, D.C.

⁶⁴ Lecture by: Dr. Y.A. Aslandogan, Board member of the Gülen Institute, at the Centre for Strategic & International Studies (CSIS) Wednesday, June 17, 2009.

Yavuz in the book *Turkish Islam and the Secular State*⁶⁵ describes three different socio-historical periods in the movement, each shaped by structural changes that eventually led to the movement in its current shape and size. The constantly changing political and economical situation in Turkey as described in the previous chapter, has made the focus of the Gülen movement evolve from building an Islamic faith-based community to creating the worldwide faith inspired educational system. The first period, from 1970 to 1983, is referred to by Yavuz as the religioconservative community building period. In this period, as a director of the Kestaneparazı Quranic school and dormitory, Gülen spiritually guided and tutored a core group of students which had to form the foundation of an exclusive religious community in Izmir.

Those students were very important in the early stages of the development of the movement. The building of the religious community continues in summer camps in which Gülen put his ideas into practice and developed a theology of religious activism. This theology emphasized the importance of the life of the prophet Muhammad and the heroic history of the Ottoman Empire. In order for Turkey to become “great” again like in the Ottoman days, Islam had to be brought back into all aspects of life. Initially Gülen wanted to restrain his religious community from involvement in politics because he regarded political activity to be a threat to a dutiful Islamic community. However, due to the growing polarization of Turkish politics, especially with the rise of the radical leftist groups, the movement eventually took an anticommunist stance and became conservative nationalistic in its outlook. The state security became an important concern for Gülen and his movement because the state had to protect Islam against leftist and Soviet enemies.

While avoiding the active practice of politics the movement did find other ways to infiltrate into public spaces such as educational institutions, the media, and the market. In some cases the movement established its own institutions and in others they gained influence by using its followers’ connections. State oppression and lacking financial recourses made Gülen, at this time, limited in his ways to reach out to followers and potential followers. To inspire as many people as possible he therefore employed informal and tightly knit religious networks such as the dershanes but also so called light houses (*ışık evler*) to consolidate solidarity. The lighthouses provide a place to stay and study for university students. They give them the opportunity to develop a Muslim identity and protect them from temptations of the outside world.

Because the Gülen movement, already in its earliest period developed in a quite unique and complicated way, with all its connections and branches, Yavuz provides a clear description

⁶⁵ The following description of the development of the Gülen movement is based on: H. Yavuz, ‘The Gülen movement’, in: Yavuz, Esposito, ed., *Turkish Islam and the Secular State; The Gülen Movement*, 30-47.

of its structure; 'It helps to envision the Gülen movement as a web of formal and informal relations that constantly activates its members' loyalty. These relations are carried out within a set of networks in which commitment to the goals of the movement are maintained through informal living spaces –the lighthouses, the dormitories, the summercamps- an through regular fundraising activities. In these mixed public-private spaces, the participants have the opportunity to bring religious and secular ideas and practices together, to pray together, and to discuss social and political issues. Moreover, the same networks are used to find jobs, housing, and better education for members of the community. In other words, one sees the process of the deprivatization of Islam in terms of bringing Islamic values, agents, and institutions into the public spaces."⁶⁶

The second period 1983-1997

The second period, from 1983 to 1997 is characterized by the spread of the movement throughout Turkey and later on Central Asia and its educational nature. In the second period the boundaries of the religious community relaxed somewhat and a market friendly educational movement appeared. The growth of the movement involved with this transformation changed its organizational structure; it became more and more decentralized. It was in this period that the movement seized the opportunity to grow out into one of the most powerful movements of Turkey. As described in the previous chapter, the changing political situation under the reign Prime Minister Turgut Özal in the 1980's created new opportunities for the movement. Close ties with this ruler along with an improving economic situation gave them the opportunity to become involved in economic, cultural and media activities. The entry in those new fields resulted in a transformation of the movement itself. It started to aim on being more professional, establishing broadcasting companies, cultural foundations, newspapers, and a complex web of business networks which became the financial groundwork of the movement.

The main media networks through which the Gülen movement reaches out to followers and the rest of the world are its newspaper *Zaman* which was founded in 1986 and several TV stations such as *Ebru TV*, *Samanyolu TV*, and *Burç FM*. *Zaman* grew out to be a daily newspaper published in Turkish and English with a big website and monthly publications in various other languages such as Dutch. Together with the other media outlets the newspaper tries to balance the interests of the movements with the demand of its audience. Those requirements have made the various media outlets into appealing and influential instruments for the transmission of news and religious and social matters. The Turkish government headed by

⁶⁶ H. Yavuz, 'The Gülen movement', 32.

Özal tried to use Gülen's growing popularity. The Prime Minister lifted the ban on Gülen's public sermons and withdrew the arrest warrant issued against him after the 1980 military coup. Özal tried to use the Gülen ideology to counterbalance the extremist Islamist groups and expected him to become the "Muslim preacher of liberalism".⁶⁷ The emergence and growth of the Gülen movement in the 1980's in Turkey on the various described levels such as finance, education, and media molded the Gülen landscape as the movement spread throughout Central Asia, the Balkans and later on the rest of the world.

External pressure and internal opening

The third distinctive period in the history of the Gülen movement started with the soft military coup in 1997. The coup was staged to prevent 'fundamentalist' Islamic forces from taking over the Turkish state. Necmettin Erbakan's democratically elected Refah or Welfare Party was banned from the political arena and several other measures were taken to restrict the presence of Islam in the public sphere. Although Gülen himself got caught up in the crackdown of religious activity resulting from this coup, he thought the Welfare Party had been on its way toward the 'Iranization' of Turkey.⁶⁸ As mentioned earlier, Gülen publicly defended the military intrusion and he did not protest the oppression of less radical Sunni Islamic groups. Fethullah Gülen probably took this stance to prove to the state that his movement was different from other Islamic groups, and gain legitimacy from the Kemalist regime. Gülay Gökçürk states that Gülen over the years has not been very consistent when it came to issues on democracy and human rights. He always seems to put the interests of the movement above the wellbeing of society as a whole, even if this would mean supporting anti-Islamic campaigns or oppressive behavior by the military.⁶⁹ The state and some secular politicians on the other hand chose to support Gülen and his movement to contain the more radical Islamic groups.

In 1999 the tide turned for Fethullah Gülen. After several speeches with doubtful contents showed up in the Turkish media, he was accused of trying to undermine the secular Turkish State. For a couple of weeks those speeches dominated the Turkish media, including newspapers, TV, and radio. Among other things, the media especially expressed its worries about Gülen's connections with religious communities abroad, which could possibly be used to undermine the Turkish regime from outside. Their other fear was the supposed attempts the Gülen movement made to infiltrate important state institutions such as the judiciary, the police,

⁶⁷ Idem, 38.

⁶⁸ Park, 'The Gülen Movement', 2.

⁶⁹ G. Gökçürk, 'Devletin İnançtiyle' *Sabah* (25 June, 1999), quoted in: H. Yavuz, 'The Gülen movement',43.

and the military.⁷⁰ Those accusations of deliberate infiltration are always denied by the movement. Their explanation for the growing number of followers in government jobs is the fact that a growing number of Turks is joining the movement so it is only logical that they also work as policemen, judges, or in the military. People from all professions and social backgrounds are attracted to the Gülen movement.

Gülen himself has on various occasions denied that he had any intentions to get involved in politics or to seize power in Turkey. He does not regard Islam to be a political project which should be implemented. He strongly states that: 'Islam does not purpose a certain unchangeable form of government or attempt to shape it. Instead, Islam establishes fundamental principles that orient a government's general character, leaving it to the people to choose the type and form of government according to time and circumstances.'⁷¹ At the same time he encourages all of his followers to participate in the elections, but he does not affiliate with a specific party or person. He gives out guidelines by which his followers should judge the candidates such as honesty, suitability, democratic values. In other words it can be said that he Gülen supports whatever candidate suits the general principles of his movement the best. By not affiliating to any specific party, the parties will always try their best to gain his sympathy and next to that most importantly the support of his followers who make up an impressive electorate. Furthermore, this tactic also makes the movement appealing for people from all walks of life.⁷²

In addition to this it is interesting to note that besides voting Gülen strongly discourages his followers to become active participants in the political process. Prominent members working for specific political parties could imply a connection between the movement and that party. Such an association can have various negative effects; the party can possibly try to influence the movement, and on the other hand could it scare away potential followers. Those followers make up the foundation of the movement since Gülen in favor of a bottom-up approach when it comes to establishing the ideal (Islamic) state in which individuals are to be transformed, this state cannot be fulfilled by force or from the top down. He is picturing a specific kind of state, different from what we know from Iran and Saudi Arabia; 'he advocates an Anatolian-Islam or Anatolian-Sufism that puts an emphasis on tolerance and modernity as an alternative to Saudi or Iranian versions or images, emphasizing that this discourse of Islam is not in contradiction to the

⁷⁰ The allegations are paraphrased from news reports, editorials, and other articles in Turkish dailies in June 1999 such as *Star*, *Cumhuriyet*, *Sabah*, and etc. and stated in: E. Özdalga, 'Redeemer or Outsider? The Gülen Community in the Civilizing Process', in: *The Muslim World*, Vol 95 (July 2005) 439-440.

⁷¹ F. Gülen, quoted in: I. Yilmaz, 'State, Law, Civil Society and Islam in Contemporary Turkey' in: 396-397.

⁷² Yilmaz, 'State, Law, Civil Society and Islam in Contemporary Turkey', 397.

modern world. His discourse represents a kind of “moderate Islam,” even though he strongly rejects such a definition, as in his view, Islam is already moderate.⁷³

This bottom-up transformation of society is primarily to be accomplished through education, one of the most important aspects of the Gülen ideology. Gülen argues that pious Muslims should get engaged in all aspects of modern Turkey and that they should help to shape its institutions. In this way religion and the ‘Gülen way of life’ could be integrated in all facets of society. He wanted to educate a new elite in his schools influenced by his ideas but specialized not in religion but in sciences, English and economics instead of just religion. This educated elite later on would be able to come into positions from which they could shape society through their activities. In this way for example bureaucrats and businesspeople can play a more influential role in society than a preacher. Especially in Turkey this was important since the purely religious part of society played a very marginalized role therefore people with only a religious education were not in influential positions.⁷⁴ Of course eventually the goal of this bottom-up transformation is also an attempt to control society and it is therefore sometimes seen as a slow and secretive infiltration on behalf of the Gülen movement. The next paragraph will elaborate further on the educational system which was inevitable for the creation of this elite in Turkey and various other countries.

Besides the media allegations Gülen was also officially charged in 1999 for ‘establishing an illegal organization in order to change the secular structure of the state and to establish a state based on religious rules.’⁷⁵ This charge combined with severe health problems related to diabetes, made Gülen decide to move to the United States where he has lived ever since on a ranch in Pennsylvania. From there he still provides his followers with his ideology mostly via his extended media network.

Education

The privatization of the education system created an important opening for the Gülen movement in the early 1980’s to reach out to a larger part of the population. The movement anticipated on the desire for improvement of the Turkish educational system. Since the beginning of the nineties, with the collapse of the Soviet Union the movement quickly spread its educational network to Central Asia and later on also to the Western world. In addition it is interesting to note

⁷³ Idem.

⁷⁴ B. Agai, ‘Islamic Ethic of Education’, in: Yavuz, Esposito, ed., *Turkish Islam and the Secular State; The Gülen Movement*, 54-55.

⁷⁵ Park, ‘The Gülen Movement’, 1.

that Gülen schools are almost absent in the Arabic world.⁷⁶ Both in Turkey and abroad Gülen schools religious teaching or explicit mentioning of Fethullah Gülen is usually absent from the Gülen educational facilities except in cases when they have to abide the government curriculum. As mentioned earlier the schools mainly focus on technical and scientific teaching and knowledge of English. Students from the Gülen high schools in Turkey achieve excellent results on university exams, much better than students who attended the state schools. Yavuz expresses a concern which is also emphasized by various other researches of the Gülen educational system when he writes that; ‘they [the schools] stress memorization and conservative values more than critical thinking. The movement’s education system is similar to the Turkish state education system in that it does not promote free will and individualism, but rather a collective consciousness and a strict sense of duty to something greater than the self.’⁷⁷

Owing to the Ottoman nationalist background of the Gülen ideology, his education network is mostly present in the Turkic regions of the former Soviet Union, in Central Asia. Hence, this region will function as an example in this chapter. Moreover, there was only little information available about the schools in Turkey besides the references to their curriculum.

Initially the collapse of the Soviet Union especially opened opportunities for the state and private companies. With policies especially designed for this purpose they started to develop networks to expand their presence and influence in Central Asia. However, very soon, Fethullah Gülen took the lead in this process. The first schools in the Turkic Republics in Central Asia, such as Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan were established in 1992/93 when the relations between Turkey and those republics were good, probably because they were recent. Supported by Prime Minister Özal, who politically backed the establishment of the schools, Gülen started his mission to introduce his movement in the Turkic part of Asia. Iran, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia have at that time also, though unsuccessfully tried to disseminate their version of Islam in this region. However, the Gülen ideology had proved to be the most appealing since many Central Asian Turks view it as a Sufi oriented, “softer”, Turkish understanding of Islam, which was closer to their own interpretation than the rigid Islamic interpretations from Saudi Arabia.⁷⁸

The process by which the Gülen movement was introduced in the Central Asian countries is not unique for this region but is also seen in the United States and in Western Europe. Already before the fall of the communist regime in the Soviet Union and the

⁷⁶ B. Balci, ‘Fethullah Gülen’s Missionary Schools in Central Asia and Their Role of the Spreading of Turkism and Islam’, *Religion, State & Society*, Vol. 31, No. 2 (2003) 6.

⁷⁷ H. Yavuz, ‘The Gülen movement’, 39; this concern was also expressed by Professor H.R. Ebaugh who has done research on the movement, in an interview on 07 July 2009.

⁷⁸ H. Yavuz, ‘The Gülen movement’, 39.

independence of the Turkic States, Gülen and his advisors had urged their followers to move to Central Asia. They used a strategy which can be seen as a type of *kardeş şehir* or twinning between a city in Turkey and a city in Central Asia. Usually starting with businessmen but they were soon followed by students, teachers, journalists and other members of the movement from one specific city concentrated their efforts on one Central Asian city. Those people are sent to develop a solid foundation for the movement through contacts with important companies, bureaucrats, and political figures. Secondly, they invited Uzbek, Kazakh, Turkmen, and Kyrgyz officials to Turkey to show them the private schools and other activities of the movement to convince them to support a replication of the Gülen educational system in their home countries.⁷⁹ The network of influential people with which the movement works is crucial for the establishment and growth of the movement in Asia but also in the West. With the help of the right people in the right places they are able to overcome a lot of bureaucratic obstacles, which every movement meets when trying to establish itself.⁸⁰ After their arrival, due to the previously made connections, the educational representatives easily get permission from local authorities to support one of the local schools or transform an existing school. Those early connections helped to open, in each of the Central Asian republics, dozens of schools. Those schools would stay under the control of the hosting state and they continue to pay part of the expenses, however all the other costs like computers, books, and science equipment are paid for by the Turkish businessmen from the Gülen movement.

In several sources the activities of the Gülen movement are described as missionary and compared to the methods used by the Jesuits in the way they propagated the Christian religion over the world. Unlike true missionaries however not only do they seek to deliver the message of God but Turkish culture along with it.⁸¹ Once they enter one of the Gülen schools, children begin a schooling life very different from what they were used to at the state schools. Every child, even if the parents live nearby has to stay in the dormitories. This system allows educators to control their students in all aspects of life. The teachers on the schools are usually educated at Turkey's top universities, such as Middle East Technical University in Ankara and *Boğaziçi* University in Istanbul.

Having done research at the Gülen schools in various Central Asian countries, Bayram Balci, a French scholar of Turkish origin, argues different in his article 'Fethullah Gülen's missionary schools in Central Asia and their role in the spreading of Turkism and Islam'.

⁷⁹ B. Balci, 'Fethullah Gülen's Missionary Schools', 2-3.

⁸⁰; Interview over the phone with Mr A.Yurtsever chairman of the Rumi Forum in Washington DC, 20 June 2009.

⁸¹ The missionary character of the education system is mentioned in: B. Balci, 'Fethullah Gülen's Missionary Schools', 11; H. Yavuz, 'The Gülen movement', 39.

Although it is often claimed by representatives of the movement that their teachers were educated at the most prestigious universities in Turkey and also the media constantly echo this information, research shows that this is not true. 'Of course some of the teachers obtained their diplomas at *Boğaziçi*, *Bilkent* or in other prestigious universities. But they are a minority and systematically sent to the most popular and prestigious schools, which serve a nice and attracting display of the very best of the nurcu... The high schools located in each capital city have the best professors because they have to be the best, they have to give back the best image as possible of these institutions.'⁸²

In addition the teachers, *Belletmen*, tutors also have an important job guiding the students. They are usually Turkish students who have left Turkey for various reasons and their mission is simple: they act as an elder brother (*Abi*) or role model to the young pupils. They guide them in their every day life and activities and teach the pupils about good hygiene, adequate nutrition, and etc. When the children are in school during the day, the belletmen attend university. It provides them with working experience and a free education at the same time. Most, ninety percent, of those tutors, and the numbers are the same for teachers are male. It is not impossible to find female members of the movement in this region but they are certainly rare.⁸³ The system with the "elder brothers" functioning as guides is really common within the Gülen community not only in Central Asia but also in most other areas.

With the expansion of the Gülen movement from Turkey to Central Asia and the rest of the world, its emphasis shifted. Although it first of all remained a religious movement, they emphasized more on being a movement to promote Islam as education. Through its schools it stresses *hizmet* which is clearly explained by H.R. Ebaugh and D. Koc in their article 'Funding Gülen inspired good works: Demonstrating and generating commitment to the movement': 'Hizmet is an overarching concept that denotes service to one's fellow human beings and is rooted in the Islamic belief that every individual will be held accountable for the way he or she has lived in this world. In Gülen's words: "Therefore the worldly life should be used in order to earn the afterlife and to please the One who has bestowed it. The way to do so is to seek to please Allah and, as an inseparable dimension of it, to serve immediate family members, society, country, and all of humanity accordingly. This service is our right, and sharing it with others is our duty (Unal, 267).'⁸⁴ In short it can be said that the movement emphasizes on charity, doing good work, and a just and peaceful society for everyone, however they try to accomplish this

⁸² B. Balci, 'Fethullah Gülen's Missionary Schools', 9-10.

⁸³ B. Balci, 'Fethullah Gülen's Missionary Schools', 10.

⁸⁴ The concept of *hizmet* explained in: H.R. Ebaugh, D. Koc, 'Funding Gülen inspired good works: Demonstrating and generating commitment to the movement', in: *Muslim World in Transition: Contributions of the Gülen Movement. Conference Proceedings* (Leeds Metropolitan University Press, 2007) 548.

without invoking religious teachings. Gülen believes that there are other ways to spread Islam especially in Central Asia and other areas in which the institutions and legislation are secular and it is not realistic to propagate religion without being cautious. Therefore the Gülen movement has shifted its way of Islamizing the young generation from *tebliğ* and *irşad* to *temsil*. *Tebliğ* is to openly profess and teach the “good” mission and the word of God and can be described as open Islamic proselytism. Gülen emphasizes that this method creates a gap between those who believe and those who don’t believe. This distinction should be given up because it complicates the missionary work. *Irşad* can be described as open and assertive teaching of Islam.

Instead of those two ways of spreading Islam Gülen strongly advises his disciples to put into practice the *temsil*; ‘the persuasion of others regarding the good nature of Islam through good deeds and a moral lifestyle’⁸⁵ Thus the schools, but also the media and the lighthouses became the movement’s channels of representing good deeds and intentions. Through *temsil* Gülen’s followers will never openly utter the word Islam or pronounce the names Gülen or Nursi. The teachers and *abi*’s at the school for example, live in a polite, immaculate, and respectful way. They serve as an example for the students and for the rest of the community. Balci describes this as follows; ‘They somehow must embody their ideals. Their day to day attitude is a preach in itself for the *nurcu* ideas. Each teacher has to adopt and exemplary behavior which will have to be in full compliance with his exemplary speech, so as to be an example for others.’⁸⁶ In short it can be said that they never openly express the ideology of Islam, rather they live it.

Media and business networks

Besides education, the philosophy of Fethullah Gülen is also very much focused on engagement in the market economy and the media. Understanding the opportunities available in a free market economy the movement is founded on ‘a complex web of business networks and controls a large media empire’.⁸⁷ It owns various magazines with totally different backgrounds and contents; *Sızıntı*; a monthly scientific magazine, *Ekoloji*; a magazine on environment related issues, *Yeni Ümit*; a theological journal, and *Zaman*⁸⁸ a daily newspaper. Moreover the

⁸⁵ H. Yavuz, ‘The Gülen movement’, 41.

⁸⁶ B. Balci, ‘Fethullah Gülen’s Missionary Schools’, 15.

⁸⁷ Yavuz, ‘Towards and Islamic Liberalism?’, 596.

⁸⁸ *Zaman* is an Istanbul-based daily paper that also prints special international editions for some other countries. It is printed in 11 countries and distributed in 35 countries. It was founded in 1986 and was the first Turkish daily to go online in 1995. It contains national (Turkish), international, business and other news. It also has many regular columnists who cover current affairs, interviews and a culture section. In addition to four locations in Turkey, regional editions are printed and distributed in Australia, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Germany, Romania, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Macedonia, Turkmenistan, and the US. (source: [www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zaman_\(newspaper\)](http://www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zaman_(newspaper))).

movement owns two other media outlets; Samanyolu TV and Burç FM.⁸⁹ Those last three outlets are the most influential and used frequently to bring the Gülen ideology and views to a broad public. It is interesting to note that in their newspapers and also on TV they also offer alternative arguments on a regular basis in order to maintain integrity and respect among the public at large.

The impact of the Gülen media network was shown by the previously mentioned poll organized by the distinguished U.S. periodical *Foreign Policy* and the British magazine *Prospect*. In this poll Fethullah Gülen was voted first among a hundred of the world's most famous intellectuals. He won a landslide victory attracting over 500.000 votes. This outcome of the poll surprised the organizers, who had in some cases not even heard of the intellectual yet, and they attributed it to a persistent promotion by Gülen's disciples after *Zaman* newspaper had published the poll. Bulent Kenes, editor-in-chief of the newspaper denied a hijack of the poll and he attributed the victory to the large amount of people being inspired by the Fethullah Gülen and his movement. Either way the result showed a significant political trend in Turkey and the abilities of Gülen's media network who managed to mobilize half a million people.⁹⁰

In addition to the newspapers and TV channels, the Gülen movement also controls Asya Finans, which is one of the fastest growing financial institutions. This company is backed by sixteen partners and has a capital of over half a billion US dollars. The educational activities described in the previous paragraph are mainly financed by a powerful association of businessmen named İSHAD (İş Hayatı Dayanışma Derneği). This association includes over 2000 businessmen and merchants. It can be said that with this extensive network of businessmen, teachers, journalists, students, and followers, Fethullah Gülen has created a stable and well founded movement with a solid foundation and the possibility to reach out to a large part of the Turkish population and a growing part of the rest of the world.

⁸⁹ H. Yavuz, 'The Gülen movement', 36.

⁹⁰ R. Tait, 'Islamic scholar voted world's No 1 thinker', in: *The Guardian* (June 23, 2008).

Chapter Three

The Gülen Movement in the United States

'For one or two centuries, our people have been pushed to "swim in separate lanes" with different ideas. Today that period of differences is being experienced. What was to be gained by this? Was it gained? No. We were in friction with one another. We separated in order to solve the problem, but we didn't attain what we expected to. As a result we lost our own paradise'⁹¹

An interesting partnership between a U.S. public university and a private Turkish-American Gülen foundation led me to Houston, Texas to study the Gülen movement in the United States. Hoping to investigate whether claim of the Gülen movement in the United States of promoting dialogue as an opposition to the Clash of Civilizations theory is justifiable. Most of the research for this chapter was conducted through interviews with people from the movement, people affiliated with the movement, and people from other religions who participated in interfaith dialogue activities organized by the Gülen movement. I have conducted this research with the criticism as it is known in the Netherlands, but as the examples display also in the United States, in the back of my mind. Unfortunately however, I did not have the opportunity to speak to American critics of the movement.

An interesting partnership

As mentioned in the introduction of this paper, the Gülen Institute in Houston Texas has been founded as a joint initiative of the University of Houston, Graduate School of Social Work and the Institute of Interfaith Dialog (IID) from that same city. The cooperation between the University and the IID started when several academics were invited to join the institute on a trip to Turkey. Almost all Gülen affiliated organizations organize such trips on which they take students, academics and journalists to Turkey on a cultural and educational trip. During this trip they visit various Gülen organizations and companies such as the Journalist and Writers Foundation, the *Zaman* newspaper, and Gülen educational facilities. Those visits combined with some more cultural, touristy activities introduce the participants of the trip to the Gülen movement and its activities. It was interesting to see that various scholars from the University of Houston had joined the interfaith dialogue institute on one of the trips after being invited by a Gülen member. They were all very positive about their experiences in Turkey and the Gülen ideology. After the

⁹¹ Ünal, Williams, ed., *Advocate of Dialogue*, 217-218.

trip each of those scholars had become actively involved in the movement for example as a board member and maybe more importantly they connected their name to the movement.⁹²

After his trip to Turkey Professor Achenbaum met with members of the IID in Houston who had generously sponsored his trip to Turkey and he became member of a faculty advisory board to the IID.⁹³ Being in this position Achenbaum decided to introduce members of the IID administration to the dean of the University of Houston, Graduate School of Social Work, Professor Ira Colby, hinting on a possible partnership between the two. This could be interesting for the social work department because they had increasingly noticed that after 9/11 it had become necessary to create a better understanding of the Muslim world among students and faculty, than based on the information offered by mainstream media. Additionally, the Social Work department at the University of Houston has a character compared to other social work departments. Over the years this department has been actively involved in the promotion and support of various peace building processes. A partnership with the IID, which promotes the establishment of stable peace, social justice, and social harmony, would be an addition to the goals they are trying to reach. Initially there were various people who did not agree with the partnership between the university and this religiously rooted movement. However, the Institute organizes social activities and reaches out to the community through gatherings and interfaith dialogue activities, not really emphasizing on Islam. This approach is distinctive for the Gülen movement as described in the previous chapter.⁹⁴

The agreement signed between the two parties declares the following: 'The primary goal of IID is to help bring together communities of diverse faiths and cultures in order to promote mutual understanding, empathy, peaceful coexistence, partnership, cooperation, and community service through interfaith dialog and conversation. IID is dedicated to encouraging the study of the global communities' spiritual traditions from the vantage point of respect, accuracy, and appreciation.'⁹⁵ Moreover the IID agreed to financially support scholarships and other educational expenses that with the Institute's goal. In reality this means that the Institute provides scholarships for various undergrad and doctoral students, mostly from Turkey, with a full or partial scholarship to study at the University of Houston. In return the university agreed to

⁹² Information from interviews: Interview with Professor H. R. Ebaugh; Interview with Professor Andy Achenbaum, Professor of History and Social Work at the University of Houston, Houston, Texas USA, 26 June 2009; Interview with Professor Lynn Mitchell, Head of the Religious Studies Department at the University of Houston, Houston, Texas, USA, 07 July 2009.

⁹³ Achenbaum, *Serendipitous consequences of the Turko-Islamic Gülen Movement*, 11.

⁹⁴ Interview with Professor Ira Colby, Dean of the Graduate College of Social Work of the University of Houston, Houston, Texas, USA, 02 July 2009.

⁹⁵ Affiliation and Cooperative Agreement between IID and the Graduate College of Social Work; University of Houston 2007, cited in: Idem, 11-12.

provide office space for the Gülen Institute and to facilitate guest speakers, luncheon forums, and other lectures.⁹⁶ Hence, several keynote speakers from different political backgrounds have visited the Institute. On the website of the movement pictures of those lectures by, among others, former Secretary of State James A. Baker III, former Secretary of State Madelaine Albright, and several local Members of Congress are shown with pride.⁹⁷

Organization of the Gülen movement

The case of the Gülen Institute, which stems from collaboration between the University of Houston and the IID, is unique in the United States. However, it does seem a logical consequence of the way in which the Gülen movement spreads throughout the world and in the United States. The movement is not divided in branches which establish in various countries and cities. Rather it consists of institutions which can be divided under the five different legs which make up the movement and appear in cities all over the world with a Turkish community. The process by which the movement develops itself in each city is similar.

- Business networks; movement participants from the Turkish community in a certain city, inspired by Gülen's understanding, by his discourse, writing and action establish a business network; a network of Turkish businessmen, usually from the area, who will later on fund the other institutions of the movement.
- Dialogue centers; After setting up the business network the movement usually starts expanding with a dialogue centre, which organizes activities to inform people about the Gülen ideology and tries to bring together different people for discussion and dialogue.
- Educational facilities; simultaneously, in most cities educational facilities are being set up. Providing education for, among others, the children of the businessmen, a good education for their children is a direct outcome of their investments in the Gülen movement.
- Media; the *Zaman* newspaper, *Ebru* TV and various magazines.
- Charitable foundations; Those foundations reach out to people in need all over the world. Some examples in which the Gülen movement provided relief during disasters are the hurricane Katrina and the earthquakes in Pakistan.⁹⁸

⁹⁶ Interview with Professor I. Colby.

⁹⁷ www.guleninstitute.org.

⁹⁸ Interview with A. Yurtsever.

All the dialogue centers, schools, and other institutions are organized in a decentralized way. There is no umbrella organization overseeing the various activities, just separate groups of people inspired and guided by the Gülen ideology, who know what to do and what type of institutions to set up. This decentralized character makes it complicated to get a clear image of the movement and how it is organized for instance in the United States. Looking for Gülen institutions on the internet barely has any result. The names of the dialogue centers vary from the Rumi Forum in Washington DC and the Istanbul Center in Atlanta, Georgia, to the Turkish Cultural Center in New York, and the Institute of Interfaith Dialog in Houston Texas. All names which are related to Gülen and his background, but which not directly refer to the movement. The explanation lying behind the naming of the institutes is not unambiguous. The most common reason given by the interviewees, is the fact that that Fethullah Gülen is often described by himself as well as by his followers as a humble and modest person who does not want his name to be attached to such a large organization. Moreover it was often mentioned that the institutions are founded by people inspired by the Gülen ideology but not by Fethullah Gülen himself. Therefore they do not carry his name. It is on the other hand common that Gülen becomes the honorable president of the institute. A third reason they noted was security. One large organization is more vulnerable when it comes to attacks from outside parties. The independently functioning smaller institutions are more easily controllable and suggest no link with institutions in other cities or countries.⁹⁹

Except for his ideology, Fethullah Gülen himself does not play an important role in the movement in the United States. Due to severe health problems he is not able to appear in public often. However he does attend the afternoon prayer in his home in Pennsylvania everyday and offers his disciples the opportunity to ask questions. Those question and answer sessions are posted online for all his followers to read. When asking about the influence of Gülen on the movement, all the interviewees answered similarly. They emphasized the fact that he does not control the movement; rather, Gülen and his ideology function as a source of inspiration. He does not tell his members what to do or what type of activities to organize or institutions to set up. Gülen is an advisor who will answer questions from his followers when they ask his advice and there is room for discussion. Due to the independency of each of the institutions the question what will happen if in the future the Hocaefendi were to pass away was easily answered. Since Gülen functions only as an inspiration and he supposedly does not control the movement or its

⁹⁹ Idem.; Interview with Kemal Oksuz, Executive Director of the Institute of Interfaith Dialog in Houston (Houston Texas, USA; 04 July 2009); Interview with Can Dogan, Professor in Economics at the University of Houston and active member of the Gülen movement in Houston (Houston, Texas, USA; 10 July 2009); Interview with Sait Yavuz, Director of Academic Affairs of the Gülen Institute, Houston (Houston, Texas, USA; 26 June 2009).

activities, nothing would change after his death. It would be considered as a great loss, also because he will no longer be able to answer his disciple's questions, but the movement would not cease to exist.¹⁰⁰

As mentioned in a previous paragraph quite a few 'big names' such as former Secretary of State James A. Baker III, former Secretary of State Madelaine Albright have been invited to give a lecture at the Gülen institute. Moreover when talking to members of the Gülen community in the United States, reading their promotional material, and looking at the various websites it shows that the movement attaches great value to connections with people in high places; in the university, in politics (locally as well as on a national level), and in religious institutions. The reason behind this according to the interviewees is first of all because those people have a trustworthy name in American society; hence, they will improve the image of the movement, and so do connections with religious people of distinction. Secondly the interviewees admitted that for an organization like the Gülen movement it is convenient to know influential people when you want something to be done. When there are plans to build a school, organize an activity, or set up an institute people in local politics are capable to help the movement in case of permits, housing, and etc. Whereas the first reason seems likely of course the second one is more difficult to prove. As described in the previous chapter the movements method of winning over people in higher positions to accomplish goals is common especially in Central Asia, however there is no concrete proof in the United States. There is on the other hand also interaction between the two reasons because a more reliable name might also stimulate (government) support for the movement.

American Fethullahci

It is difficult to describe the adherents of the Gülen movement, not only in the United States but everywhere. The boundaries of the movement are, maybe deliberately, very vague. There is a group of people interested in the movement who also participate in e.g. interfaith dialogue activities. However on the other hand there are the followers or disciples of Fethullah Gülen and his ideology. In the first group, the participants are not different from the mainstream population in terms of ethnicity, culture, sex, and social class. Projects and activities are open to everyone and people from all religions are invited to participate especially in interfaith dialogue activities. In the second group however, because the Gülen ideology is founded on Islamic principles it is probably fair to say that almost all disciples are Turkish Muslims, most of these people are probably also donating money to support the activities of the movement.

¹⁰⁰ Interview with K. Oksuz; Interview with S. Yavuz; Interview with C. Dogan; Lecture by Dr Y.A. Aslandogan.

Basically, back in Turkey the motto of the movement is that anybody could be in. Certain principles propagated by the movement such as altruism and the absence of any self interest, trust and independence, abiding the law and respect for the state, and non-partisanship are attractive to many people. In the United States it is however obvious that most followers of the movement are higher educated Turkish people; university students with a Turkish background, business people who have usually enjoyed a higher education in either the United States or Turkey. This is probably caused by the ideology of the movement which promotes education and sciences. Another reason is probably the fact that most Turkish immigrants in the United States were already from an educated background before moving to the country.¹⁰¹ The diffuse and vague boundaries between people who are just interested and the followers add to the secretive character of the Gülen movement. It is hard to see who is 'in', and who is just interested and 'out' of the movement. This makes it hard to define the number of Gülen adherents.

It was difficult to find information on the children attending the Gülen schools in the United States. Supposedly there are only five official private Gülen schools in the country. In addition to those schools there are also an unknown number of charter schools. On various, mostly websites the number of schools is estimated around ninety.¹⁰² Charter schools in the US are elementary or secondary schools which receive public money but they don't have to adhere to the regulations, rules, and statutes that apply to other public schools. In exchange for this freedom they have to produce certain results which are stated in the school's charter. Charter schools are not allowed to charge tuition. They just provide an alternative to normal public schools. Some of the schools provide their students with a curriculum which specializes in a certain field such as math, arts, or science. Others just focus on providing a better and more efficient general education to their students than the public schools in the region. Charter schools have no accountability to the government, only to their own boards. These charter schools are high rated and attended by children from various backgrounds, often also non-Turkish and non-Muslim. To what extent those schools can really be called Gülen schools did not become clear. It can probably be said that at most of the schools a part of the teachers has a Gülen background and will live their lives according to the Gülen ideology. It is most likely for those schools to focus on sciences. Besides education the charter schools also provide extra curricular activities such as summer camps. The worry that children are not being taught to question what they learn and are just trained to memorize which Yavuz expressed about the

¹⁰¹ Idem.

¹⁰² I could not find any official Gülen sources stating the number of charter schools in the United States therefore this number was drawn from an article on various anti-islamic blogs which stated that the movement is trying to infiltrate the country through those schools. A possibly more reliable source which also stated this number was www.turkishforum.com.tr.

schools in Central Asia is according to Professor Ebaugh also applicable on the schools in the United States.¹⁰³ This statement may seem ambivalent after the claim that most charter schools are highly rated when it comes to education levels. However the one thing does not out rule the other. Students from Gülen schools are like Yavuz states trained to memorize and therefore do very well on tests, on exams, and in competitions. The point of critique posted by professor Ebaugh however is more difficult to measure and might not show at first sight because the students function so well.

Women

The position of women within the movement, in the United States as well as in other countries is unclear. Although some sources emphasize that women in the Gülen ideology are allowed to play any role within society, 'including judge and president...there is no profession that is beyond limits for women',¹⁰⁴ the works of Fethullah Gülen, suggest differently. Based on interpretations of the quran and the hadith Gülen describes the role of women as compassionate and educated who will bring up the next Turkish generation. 'Women train and educate children and establish order, peace and harmony in the home. They are the first teachers in the school of humanity. At a time when some are in search of a new place for them in society, we would like to remind them once again of the unique position God bestowed upon them.'¹⁰⁵ The Gülen movement can be called conservative when it comes to relationships between men and women and they try to keep up the old tradition of segregation between the sexes. Until forbidden by law in 2000 in Turkey, Gülen schools were separated by sex. And although education for girls is encouraged as well, a large majority of the schools were for boys.¹⁰⁶ Despite the movement's conservative notion on the position of women, Fethullah Gülen has many female disciples. They are encouraged to get a good education, if possible at the university, but once they are married their role as a mother, wife, and educator of the children becomes the most important.

Unfortunately I did not have the opportunity to meet many women actively involved in the movement in Houston. Informally I did meet a female graduate student who studied at the University of Houston on a scholarship from the Gülen institute. However an attempt to conduct an interview with someone from the women's department of the IID did not work out because she was not used to giving interviews. Research done by Anna Stephenson in 2004 in Houston showed that within the Gülen community in this southern American town gender separation as

¹⁰³ Interview with Prof. H.R. Ebaugh; Interview with S.Yavuz.

¹⁰⁴ Lecture by Dr Y.A. Aslandogan.

¹⁰⁵ M.F. Gülen, *Questions and answers about faith* (The Fountain, Fairfax, VA , 2000) 52.

¹⁰⁶ E. Özdalga, 'Following in the Footsteps of Fethullah Gülen; Three Women Teachers Tell Their Stories' in: Yavuz, Esposito, ed., *Turkish Islam and the Secular State; The Gülen Movement*, 86-87

promoted by Gülen, men in the role of leaders and financial providers, and women primarily in a role as nurturers, was dominantly present. 'Men were largely recognized as leaders of the community's educational endeavors, cultural foundation, and interfaith dialogue institute. Women were active as students, mothers, volunteers, teachers, or in professions outside the movements cooperate activities.'¹⁰⁷ Professor Ebaugh in the interview confirms this image about women in the Gülen movement in Houston. They are honored and praised she says, however mostly in their role as mothers. She does however think that Houston is an exception when it comes to conservatism.¹⁰⁸ According to professor Ebaugh the situation in other American cities for women is better or different. However, I did not find any information to back this claim. Stephenson concludes by writing that 'Gender beliefs and norms in Houston's Gülen community were consistent with wider cultural and religious ambivalence toward women's equal opportunities in professional and leadership roles.'¹⁰⁹ To the outside world women rationalized their limited opportunities by claiming that they did not necessarily seek leadership roles within the community. Informally they did recognize, discuss and question their positions but never officially called for change. The limiting gender beliefs to their opinion were not based in religious traditions, but rather on incorrect religious interpretations or old fashioned morals and values which originated in the Turkish culture.¹¹⁰

Finance and commitment

All over the United States there are numerous local groups founded by individuals inspired by the ideology of Fethullah Gülen. As mentioned in the previous paragraph the message displayed by those groups is that they are all independently organized even though the members from different cities may know each other and occasionally and informally share idea's and plans. The various institutions are all non-profit. They are financed by the business networks and individuals donating money. The decision who to accept money from is different for each institution. Whereas the Rumi Forum in Washington DC will only take donations from Turkish Muslims, the IID in Texas also accepts money from other donors. The main reason why the institutes do not accept money from 'strangers' is the fear that those people from outside would want to influence the agenda. Each institute individually decides which money to accept. This is an interesting

¹⁰⁷ A.J. Stephenson, 'Leaving Footprints in Houston: Answers to Questions on Women and the Gülen Movement', presented at the conference; *The Fethullah Gülen Movement in Thought and Practice*, 4-5 March 2006 Southern Methodist University, Dallas, Texas, 34.

¹⁰⁸ Interview with Prof. H.R. Ebaugh.

¹⁰⁹ Stephenson, 'Leaving Footprints in Houston', 39-40.

¹¹⁰ Idem.

phenomenon which emphasizes the decentralization of the Gülen movement in the United States.¹¹¹

The movement has also been very careful to reject any government help, Turkish and American, or with accepting financial contributions from foreign foundations. As with taking money from strangers, they don't want to take the money because the institutions want to preserve their independence, and maintain the civic nature of their projects. The main fundraising mechanism used by the movement is called '*himmel*' which can be translated as 'donation pledge' and it refers to someone's personal commitment to do whatever needs to be done in order to create the best possible community. The movement usually has a *himmel* meeting in the month Ramadan (in this month charitable acts are more valuable) in which followers make a financial promise to an institution.¹¹²

It is a principle within the Gülen movement that everybody contributes time and financial resources. For a businessman the contribution rate is usually 10 percent of his annual income, even if this would mean donating a million dollars a year. In addition to this financial pledge the businessmen are also encouraged to reach out to other (Turkish Muslim) business people and introduce them to the movement, its projects and to the Gülen ideology. A blue-collar worker is expected to donate about 5 percent of his income. It is emphasized that no one is obliged or forced to donate money and one is free to contribute whatever they want.¹¹³ However as the theoretical framework about commitment explained in the article by Ebaugh and Koc will show, a system like this in which contribution is a principle creates commitment and attaches the follower to the movement.

The article by Ebaugh and Koc gives an interesting insight in the funding of Gülen-inspired projects in Turkey but also in Houston. The paper shows a correlation between the sacrifices asked from people and the degree in which they subsequently commit to the organization and its goals. For the research this would mean that financial support from members in the Gülen movement demonstrate not only commitment to the ideology of Fethullah Gülen but also generate dedication to the movement. With commitment they mean that 'identifying one's personal fate with the success or failure of the collectivity,'¹¹⁴ Their theoretical framework is based on research by Rosabeth Kanter in the late 1960's and early 1970's on commitment within communes in the United States. She argues that 'a person is committed to a relationship or group to the extent that he/she sees it as expressing or fulfilling some

¹¹¹ Interview with A. Yurtsever; Interview with S. Yavuz.

¹¹² Lecture by Dr. Y.A. Aslandogan.

¹¹³ Lecture by Dr Y.A. Aslandogan.

¹¹⁴ Ebaugh, Koc, 'Funding Gülen inspired good works: Demonstrating and generating commitment to the movement', 541.

fundamental part of himself and identifies group goals nourishing one's own sense of self. A committed person is loyal and involved; has a sense of belonging, a feeling that the group is an extension of himself or herself and he is and extension of the group. Through commitment, person and group are inextricably linked.¹¹⁵

In order for a community such as the Gülen movement to survive they must strategically challenge the commitment of their followers in order to reduce the value of other possible commitments. In other words, they must try to detach a person from other possibilities and distractions in life and fulfilling those needs within the movement. Kanter's research shows how the sacrifices and investments one has to make for the movement increases the level of commitment a follower feels. When linking this research to the Gülen movement it can be said that the more money the disciples invest in Gülen-inspired projects the more they believe in the goals of the movement. Moreover in case of the Gülen movement the aspect of donating money can be seen as a commitment mechanism for involvement in the group by itself. Other research on organizational studies which is also addressed in the article shows that movements with a decentralized character generate a higher level of commitment from its members than bureaucratized ones. The followers will feel like they are actively involved in the decision making process and able to influence the goals of the movement. The fact that all projects and activities of the Gülen movement are planned by local circles of supporters gives the organizers a sense of responsibility. This is a powerful way of making people committed. A final strategy widely used by the Gülen movement is the establishment of personal relationships that are high in trust. The system in which young disciples have an *Abi* as a mentor and teacher emphasizes the feeling of solidarity within the community and gives the disciple a sense of belonging.¹¹⁶

The case of the Institute of Interfaith Dialog

The Institute of Interfaith Dialog was established in 2002 in Austin, Texas. The intention at that time was to improve the relationship between Turkish and American citizens.¹¹⁷ In 2003 the headquarters moved to Houston and from there it grew out to a group which organizes activities promoting interfaith dialogue and understanding throughout the southern states of the US such as Texas, Oklahoma, Arkansas, and Mississippi. The activities organized by the institute are supported financially contributions by the members, as mentioned earlier most of them are from a Turkish Muslim descent and inspired by the ideology and teachings of Gülen. Because the movement is set up in local circles that support projects in their area, the budget of the IID is

¹¹⁵ Idem.

¹¹⁶ Idem, 547.

¹¹⁷ Interview with K. Oksuz.

mostly based on relatively small contributions provided by approximately 500 Turkish and Turkish-American followers who live in the southern states. About half of the contributors are students at one of the local universities the other half are businessmen and other professionals from the area. Through this system the IID collects over half million U.S. dollars every year.¹¹⁸ Numerous graduate students usually living on small stipends from Turkey or partial scholarships from their American universities donate between \$2000 and \$5000 a year which means a great sacrifice on their part. Feeling guilty not being able to give more money, some students even work a second job. Many students look forward to graduating and finding a real job which would make it possible to donate more money.

The other half of the people providing financial support to the movement are Turkish businessmen and professionals from within the community. Most of them educated at universities in the United States and still strongly attached to their Turkish background and heritage. The contributions of those individuals make up the largest proportion of the IID income. As an example the article mentions an engineer with some real estate investments who donates \$50.000 to \$70.000 dollars a year, about 40 percent of his income to IID. Even with this large contribution he says that he regrets not being able to invest more time in the organization.¹¹⁹ This is something also mentioned by other members who say they always regret not being able to donate more time or money and not having started giving at an earlier age.¹²⁰

The financial contributions do not give a full picture of donations people make to Gülen projects. In many cases people also donate time, talent, and food to the IID activities. The institute largely depends on the work of volunteers. Women voluntarily prepare Turkish meals for participants of activities, people updating the website, designing flyers, organizing activities, everything is done without expecting anything in return. According to Ebaugh and Koc it is not unusual for IID members to voluntarily spend 20 to 30 hours a week on Gülen-inspired projects. In addition to this time they will also get together in group meetings, usually once a week to discuss the ideas of Fethullah Gülen and other religion related topics.¹²¹

When applying this information on the theoretical framework about commitment it is possible to conclude that the amount of money and time followers of the Gülen ideology invest in the movement does not only indicate a great level of commitment, it also creates that same commitment. Also the solidarity between members of the group make the movement an

¹¹⁸ Ebaugh, Koc, 'Funding Gülen inspired good works: Demonstrating and generating commitment to the movement', 547.

¹¹⁹ Idem.

¹²⁰ Interview with C. Dogan.

¹²¹ Ebaugh, Koc, 'Funding Gülen inspired good works: Demonstrating and generating commitment to the movement', 548; Lecture by Dr Y.A. Aslandogan.

important part of your social and personal life, the close friendships could make it seem like a family. A final point when it comes to commitment is the Islamic engine of the movement previously explained as the concept of himmet. The sacrifices people make are not just to help other people and make the world a better place. Rather, all the interviewees emphasized that the good works are done to please Allah. Since giving without expecting anything in return is one of the most important aspects of the Islamic religion, the Gülen activities are a great way to fulfill this obligation.¹²²

Opinions from outside the movement

This chapter gives a brief overview of the most important characteristics of the Gülen movement and its development in the past decades from an insider's perspective. As mentioned before, most of the information found to describe the movement was written by people from the movement or at least in some way affiliated with the movement. From their description of the schools, the media outlets, the business network, the ideology, and the role of Fethullah Gülen himself I have tried to create a clear image of this unique movement which is rather difficult to define. To complete my research I have also interviewed various people from outside the movement and collected critical opinions about the movement in articles and a documentary on Dutch TV.

For their interfaith dialogue activities the Gülen movement reaches out to Jews and Christians and sometimes even to Buddhists and Hindus. To introduce them to the Gülen movement, representatives from the various religions were invited on trips to Turkey where they visit schools and other Gülen-inspired projects. Moreover they are asked to participate in dialogue activities organized by the IID or other dialogue institutes and in some cases they even become active participants such as board members. Asking them about the movement most of their answers were unambiguous. They did not get the feeling that the movement was trying to convert them to Islam, nor did they have the impression that the Fethullahci thought that Islam was better than the other religions. The emphasis in faith based discussions with people from other religious backgrounds, which I also noticed at a Gülen conference I attended in Potsdam, Germany, is on the similarities between the three Abrahamic religions. Due to both the similarities and lack of conversion tactics, religious Jews and Christians have no real reasons to oppose the movement. 'They want Muslims to be more religious' Rabbi Steven Morgen from Houston noted. This was something he could imagine since he would want Jews to be more

¹²² Idem., Interview with S. Yavuz, Interview with A. Yurtsever, Interview with Can Dogan.

Jewish too.¹²³ He did however emphasize the fact that he just got involved with the movement and he was still busy looking for information on the movement. Describing his trip to Turkey in a sermon after his return Rabbi Morgen said: 'It was one of the most exciting and meaningful adventures I have had...Each one of us in the group, though, was committed to interfaith dialog, to promoting tolerance and understanding, and to bridging the gap between our cultures, our faiths, and our communities'¹²⁴

David Capes, professor in Christianity at Houston Baptist University had long been involved in interfaith dialogue activities and thinks of the Gülen movement as a welcome addition.¹²⁵ Lynn Mitchell, Head of the Religious Studies department at the University of Houston and former reverend referred to his Gülen trip as 'the best foreign trip he ever took'. They also visited Christian landmarks in Turkey and he got introduced to a type of Islam which he did not know before; tolerance and hospitality were presented as important aspects of the Gülen ideology. When I asked him whether he had any doubts about the movement's intentions, he answered by saying that he had not noticed any. Moreover since he was part of the board of the Gülen institute he said that he would probably have noticed if they had different intentions than they claimed.¹²⁶

¹²³ Interview with Rabbi Steven Morgen, Rabbi at congregation Beth Yeshurun, Houston, Houston, Texas, USA, 25 June 2009.

¹²⁴ Abstracts from a sermon by Rabbi Steven Morgen, Congregation Beth Yeshurun, June 13, 2009.

¹²⁵ Interview with David Capes, Professor of Christianity and Interim Dean at Houston Baptist University, Houston, Texas, USA, 09 July 2009.

¹²⁶ Interview with Prof. L. Mitchell.

Conclusion

*'The West's next confrontation is definitely going to come from the Muslim World. It is in the sweep of the Islamic nations from the Maghreb to Pakistan that the struggle for a new world order will begin.'*¹²⁷

In the post Cold-war world groups of people bound by certain values seem to be getting into conflict with the values of other groups. Nowadays two civilizations in specific seem to clash, Islam and the West. Is it really possible however, to draw such sharp lines between the Western world and the Muslim world? This thesis does not investigate the clash between the Islam and the West as a whole. Its main focus is a smaller religious group which is part of the broad camp opposing Huntington's theory, and the way in which it propagates the contrary; namely the position of Gülen Movement in the United States. This thesis investigates whether their claim of being primarily an interreligious and intercultural dialogue initiative, and a counterweight to confrontational approaches that regard a clash of civilizations inevitable, is justified, or rather, that it is a smokescreen to cover a conservative Islamic agenda. I have conducted this research with the criticism as it is known in the Netherlands, but as the examples display also in the United States, in the back of my mind.

The Gülen movement launched a civil Islamic foundation to defy the existing discourse of conflict and tries to promote the idea of dialogue between civilizations on a global level. The movement is an offshoot of the Nurcu, which has roots in the Nakşibandiyya, a Sufi brotherhood from Turkish descent. Firmly organized around its leader, the reserved and secretive character of the Gülen movement raises suspicion not only in the West but also in their home country, Turkey. Fethullah Gülen and his disciples have tried to create a religious-political movement favoring modernism, Turkish nationalism, tolerance, and democracy without giving up religious rules. Their main targets are education and interfaith dialogue. By setting up schools mostly in Central Asia but also in Western countries such as the Netherlands and the United States and interfaith dialogue institutes they try to promote Gülen's ideology throughout the world.

The increasing activity, wealth, and influence of the Gülen movement are attracting not only more followers but also attention from both supporters and opponents. The good intentions the movement claims to have are doubted by various parties. They accuse the Gülen movement of having a hidden agenda. They would be after political power and by far not be as tolerant toward different minded people as they claim to be. Visiting the Gülen Institute in Houston,

¹²⁷ Indian Muslim author M.J. Akbar, cited in: Huntington, 'The Clash of Civilizations?', 32.

Texas, interviewing people from the movement, affiliated with the movement and participants of the interfaith dialogue activities, reading articles, and studying websites did give me a better insight in the movement and its ideology, though it certainly did not answer all of my questions. Descriptions of the structure of this movement are not unambiguous. They vary from it just being a modern social movement to a religious cult or a sect. All of those descriptions however, to my opinion, are unable to describe the movement as a whole. It is impossible to leave out the religious background of the Gülen movement, which makes it something else than just a social movement. On the other hand is it also difficult to display it as a cult or a sect because there are many arguments against that as well. For this thesis therefore I have decided to make use of the explanation given by Olivier Roy in his book *Globalized Islam: the search for a new Ummah*, in which he describes the movement as a neo-brotherhood that finds its origins in the Turkish Nurcu movement. The movement seems to be using a romanticized reconstruction of the Ottoman history to function as an example for its relations with other religions and as an example of the ideal state. Moreover, Sufi influences are also a source of inspiration, which in theory should not make a distinction between people from different religious backgrounds. Yet, in various cases history has proved the contrary.

Looking at the movement in the United States, it really suits the description given by Roy. The most significant characteristic of the movement is the strong hierarchical structure. The position of its leader, Fethullah Gülen, resembles that of a modern day guru who reaches out to his followers through literature and modern media facilities such as the internet. The American followers of the movement deny this hierarchical structure when they claim that Gülen only functions as an inspiration. People inspired by the Gülen ideology set up the branches in the various cities, but they are not encouraged to do so in any way, my interviewees said. However the way the movement is structured in the United States implies different. All the dialogue centers, educational facilities, and business networks are set up along similar lines. People with a Gülen background educated in Turkey at Gülen schools and guided by abi's, travel to the United States to study or work. At the same time they become active for the movement. Because of the social cohesion within the Turkish-American community, most people know one another. This makes it easy to reach out to people and make them interested and active in the movement, if they not already were active members back in Turkey.

New individuals are recruited by the movement in a similar way Roy describes for the neo-brotherhoods. Because they live in a non-spiritual and alien environment like the United States the movement can provide Islamic individuals with a community similar to what they are used to in their home country which deals with all aspects of their lives. Through the financial

support system as described by Ebaugh and Koc the followers become committed and attached to a movement which will slowly take over their lives and reduces other influences. This makes the movement inward looking and inclusive, almost like a cult. The last significant characteristic is the fact that there is no gradation in membership and no initiation process or anything of the like; its followers do not officially become members by means of registration. Therefore people have to be referred to as followers of an ideology and not as members of a movement. This makes it difficult to get a clear image of the number and background of the disciples. People supporting the Gülen ideology, come together and meet one another in the reading circles, at the activities organized by the dialogue institutes, or at the schools which their children attend.

The disciples of Fethullah Gülen in the United States are committed to the movement in various specific ways. First of all, the social cohesion within the movement is high and the followers develop important personal relationships, almost like family connections, within the group. This system emphasizes a feeling of solidarity and gives the disciple a sense of belonging. It also makes it difficult to leave the movement, because this would at the same time mean they would have to give up the majority of their religious lives and their social lives and contacts. This is something a person will not easily leave behind. To some extent might even be possible to say that the movement 'attempts to reduce the value of other possible commitments and increases the value of commitment to the group, detaching a person from other options and attaching him to the community.'¹²⁸ Secondly, the fact that most followers are actively involved in the movements' activities gives them a sense of responsibility. Most of the activities are planned among local circles of supporters. This generates both responsibility and solidarity. A final important organizational aspect which is caused by, but at the same time also creates commitment is the fact that the non profit institutions of the movement only function on money generously donated by followers of the Gülen ideology. People give large portions of their income to the movement. This is also seen as a religious obligation.

Education is the final important aspect of the Gülen movement which should be discussed. The promotion and stimulation of a good educational system, available for everyone is of course a good thing. Moreover, girls are also stimulated to go to school, something which should not be taken for granted in a lot of other Middle Eastern countries. It is easy to compare for example the movement's ideas and practices in gender issues to European and western standards and say that the movement is behind in many ways. However, it is also possible to see it in a different light and think that the progress the Gülen movement is making when it

¹²⁸ Ebaugh, Koc, 'Funding Gülen inspired good works: Demonstrating and generating commitment to the movement', 541.

comes to the education of women is a step into the right direction. This depends on the context in which the development is seen, for girls from traditional families in the Central Asian countries it might be progress. In the American context, but also in various parts of Turkey on the other hand education for girls and working women are rights which have been introduced decades ago. It also has to be emphasized that various sources have expressed worries about the extend to which the children at the schools are taught to question what they have learned.

The Gülen movement as the research shows to me is a conservative Islamic movement, which tries to function in the modern, western world and reach out to other religions without losing its strict traditional Islamic morals and values. Through their interfaith dialogue activities they seek contact with likeminded people from other religions, mostly Christians and Jews. Because of the similarities between their convictions rabbi's, reverends, priests, and even the pope are rather enthusiastic about Fethullah Gülen and his movement. Maybe even more so because it's not their congregation he seems to be after. Although the followers of Fethullah Gülen are convinced that Islam is the true religion, they seem to respect the ahl al-kitab. Moreover it should be noted that the movement are one of very few Muslim communities reaching out the Jewish community. Through the trips the institutes organize for their fellow religious partners and for academics the movement introduces them to Gülen and his ideology. It is questionable however, whether those trips paint a really versatile picture. Sources state that visitors are often taken to the same schools and institutions. Those are of course the best ones; the situation at other places might not be as good. Also the trip creates a personal bond between the visitor and the movement, which could influence their opinion and independence.

In this regard the neo-brotherhood of Fethullah Gülen really manages to build a bridge between religions. By stimulating discussion between Muslims, Christians, Jews and in some cases even Hindu's and Buddhists, the Gülen movements' claim of promoting dialogue between religions as an opposition to the Clash of Civilizations theory is truly justifiable. Yet this dialogue between civilizations seems to be one between likeminded people, although being from different religious backgrounds, with mutual traditional morals and values; one between people with the same level of faith looking for commonalities.

The criticism coming from western, modern, secularist scholars and experts is also understandable when looking at the structure and the ideology of the Gülen movement as done in this thesis. It is a well organized, conservative, religious movement with morals and values which seem alien to a western secular way of life. The movement is organized along the lines of a neo-brotherhood and has its origins in an early Islamic tradition. It is closed and secretive and the members are greatly committed to the movement and especially its leader. Their opinions,

on for example the rights of women, seem old fashioned when compared to Dutch or American standards. As a result the movement has taken an ambivalent position in the Western world. Fethullah Gülen is appreciated in religious and traditional circles because of his openness toward other religions and the dialogue activities organized by the movement. Yet, in more secular circles the movement is watched with caution because of its conservative and traditional and conservative views. Also, the fact that the main focus of the movement is on dialogue with the other Abrahamic religions rather than with secular groups causes suspicion. The Gülen movement preaches dialogue, this is not a smokescreen. However the reach of this dialogue is limited.

Bibliography

- Achenbaum, W.A., *Serendipitous consequences of the Turko-Islamic Gulen Movement*, Conference paper presented at: 'Islam in the Age of Global Challenges: Alternative Perspectives of the Gulen Movement' November 14-15, 2008 at Georgetown University, Washington, D.C.
- Agai, B. 'Islamic Ethic of Education', in: H. Yavuz, J.L. Esposito, ed., *Turkish Islam and the Secular State; The Gülen movement* (Syracuse University Press, 2003) 48-84.
- Arad, B., Caha, O., 'Fethullah Gülen and his Liberal "Turkish Islam" Movement', in: *MERIA* Vol. 4, No. 4 (December 2000)
- Balci, B., 'Fethullah Gülen's missionary schools in Central Asia and their role of the spreading of Turkism and Islam', *Religion, State & Society*, Vol 31, No. 2
- Bilici, M., 'The Fethullah Gülen Movement and its Politics of Representation in Turkey', in: *The Muslim World* Vol. 96 (January 2006) 1-20.
- Ebaugh, H.R., Koc, D., 'Funding Gülen inspired good works: Demonstrating and generating commitment to the movement', in: *Muslim World in Transition: Contributions of the Gülen Movement. Conference Proceedings* (Leeds Metropolitan University Press, 2007) 539-551.
- Fountain Compilation, *M. Fethullah Gülen; Essays, Perspectives, Opinions* (The Light, Rutherford, 2002).
- Gülen, F., *Questions and answers about faith* (The Fountain, Fairfax, VA , 2000).
- Gülen, F., *Pearls of Wisdom* (New Jersey, 2005).
- Huntington, S.P., 'The Clash of Civilizations?', in: *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 72, No. 3, 22-49.
- Huntington, S.P., *The Clash of Civilizations and the remaking of World Order* (New York, 1996).
- İnalçik, H., Quataert, D., ed., *An Economic and Social History of the Ottoman Empire 1300-1914* (Cambridge University Press, 1994)
- Kanter, R.M. 'Commitment and Social Organization: A Study of Commitment Mechanisms in Utopian Communities', in: *American Sociological Review*, Vol 33 (1968) 499-517.
- Lewis, B., *The Emergence of Modern Turkey* (Oxford University Press, London, 1961)
- Mardin, Ş., *Religion and Social Change in Modern Turkey; The case of Bediüzzaman Said Nursi* (State University of New York Press, 1989)
- Michel, T., 'Sufism and Modernity in the Thought of Fethullah Gülen', in: *The Muslim World*, Vol. 95, No. 3 (July 2005) 341-358.
- Özdalga, E., 'Following in the Footsteps of Fethullah Gülen; Three Women Teachers Tell Their

- Stories' in: H. Yavuz, J.L. Esposito, ed., *Turkish Islam and the Secular State; The Gülen movement* (Syracuse University Press, 2003) 85-114.
- Özdalga, E., 'Redeemer or Outsider? The Gülen Community in the Civilizing Process', in: *The Muslim World*, Vol 95 (July 2005) 429-446.
- Park, B., 'The Fethullah Gülen Movement', in: *MERIA*, Vol. 12, No. 3 (September 2008)
- Roy, O., *Globalized Islam: The search for the new Ummah* (Columbia University Press, 2004)
- Rubin, M., 'Turkey's Turning Point, Could there be an Islamic Revolution in Turkey?', *National Review Online* (April 14, 2008)
- Said, E.W., 'The Clash of Ignorance', in: *The Nation* (22 October 2001) 11-13.
- Schippers, H., 'Islam, politiek en gevaar van een staatsgreep in Turkije', in: *Internationale Spectator*, Jaargang 61, Nr. 4 (2007)
- Sharon-Krespin, R. 'Fethullah Gülen's grand Ambition Turkey's Islamist Danger', in: *Middle East Quarterly* (Winter 2009) 55-66
- Stephenson, A.J., 'Leaving Footprints in Houston: Answers to Questions on Women and the Gülen Movement' presented at the conference; *The Fethullah Gülen Movement in Thought and Practice*, 4-5 March 2006 Southern Methodist University, Dallas, Texas
- Tait, R., 'Islamic scholar voted world's No 1 thinker', in: *The Guardian* (June 23, 2008)
- Ünal, A., Williams, A., ed., *Advocate of Dialogue; Fethullah Gülen* (The Fountain, Virginia, 2000)
- Weber, M., *The Sociology of Religion* (Boston 1993)
- Yavuz, H., 'Political Islam and the Welfare (Refah) Party in Turkey', in: *Comparative Politics*, Vol. 30, No. 1 (Oct 1997) 66-82.
- Yavuz, H., Esposito, J.L., 'Introduction; Islam in Turkey: Retreat from the Secular Path?', in: H. Yavuz, J.L. Esposito, ed., *Turkish Islam and the Secular State; The Gülen movement* (Syracuse University Press, 2003)
- Yavuz, H., 'Towards and Islamic Liberalism?: the Nurcu Movement and Fethullah Gülen' in: *Middle East Journal* (53, No. 4, 1999) 584-604.
- Yilmaz, I., 'State, Law, Civil Society and Islam in Contemporary Turkey' in: *The Muslim World*, Vol 95 (July 2005) 385-411.
- Zürcher, E.J., *Turkey; A Modern History* (London, 1993)

Websites

www.fgulen.com

www.wikipedia.com

www.guleninstitute.org

Interviews

20 June 2009, Houston, Texas, USA; Interview over the phone with Mr. A.Yurtsever; Chairman of the Rumi Forum in Washington DC.

25 June 2009, Houston, Texas, USA; Interview with Rabbi Steven Morgen, Rabbi at congregation Beth Yeshurun, Houston.

26 June 2009, Houston, Texas USA; Interview with Professor Andy Achenbaum, Professor of History and Social Work at the University of Houston.

02 July 2009, Houston, Texas, USA; Interview with Professor Ira Colby, Dean of the Graduate College of Social Work of the University of Houston.

02 July 2009, Houston, Texas, USA; Interview with Sait Yavuz, Director of Academic Affairs of the Gülen Institute, Houston.

04 July 2009, Houston Texas USA; Interview with Kemal Oksuz, Executive Director of the Institute of Interfaith Dialog in Houston.

07 July 2009, Houston, Texas, USA; Interview with Professor Helen Rose Ebaugh; Professor at the department of Sociology, University of Houston. Her book on the Gülen movement will be published in the fall of 2009.

07 July 2009 Houston, Texas, USA; Interview with Professor Lynn Mitchell, Head of the Religious Studies Department at the University of Houston.

09 July 2009, Houston, Texas, USA; Interview with David Capes, Professor of Christianity and Interim Dean at Houston Baptist University.

10 July 2009, Houston, Texas, USA; Interview with Can Dogan, Professor in Economics at the University of Houston and active member of the Gülen movement in Houston.

Conference

Conference organized by the Institut für Religionswissenschaft and Forum für Interkulturellen Dialog e.V. Berlin; *Muslims Between Tradition and Modernity; The Gülen Movement as a Bridge Between Cultures*, University of Potsdam, Germany (26th-27th of May 2009).

Lectures

Dr. Y.A. Aslandogan, Board member of the Gülen Institute, at the Centre for Strategic & International Studies (CSIS) Washington DC, United States (June 17, 2009).

Sermon by Rabbi Steven Morgen, Congregation Beth Yeshurun, Houston, Texas, United States (June 13, 2009).

Documentary

Documentary on Dutch TV: S. Altunterim, J. Eikelboom, 'Kamermeederheid eist onderzoek naar Turkse beweging', *NOVA/ Den Haag Vandaag* (4 July 2008).

Appendix

Questionnaire Gülen movement

Question 1

I could not find a lot of information on Gülen activities in the United States on internet or in literature, mostly because the names of the various institutes do not refer to the movement. I was wondering if there is a specific reason for this. Is there such a thing as an American branch of the Gülen movement? Do you consider your institute to be a part of this movement? If possible please explain your answer.

Question 2

Mr. Fethullah Gülen has been living in the United States for some years now does he himself play an active role in the American branch of the organization?

Question 3

On the websites of the various institutes, in readers and also in information about conferences the Gülen movement often refers to "big" political or academic names that are linked to the organization.

Is the movement trying to achieve a political goal, either in the US through lobbying or in Turkey maybe with American support? And if there is no political goal, what does the movement want to reach in the US, how is this different from its goals in Turkey?

Question 4

For my research it is interesting to see how the Gülen movement is organized in the various American cities. Could you in short describe your institute and how it is organized? Things that would be interesting for my research would be; how big is the movement in your city? What kind of people do you reach out to/are interested in the movement (religious background, country of origin, social status, and male/female?) How do you reach out to those people, how do you try to make them interested in the Gülen movement?

Question 5

Because all the institutes are based on the same ideology I am curious to know how the movement is organized on a national level. Are there any connections between the various

branches/cities? Is there a nationwide network, or are there any plans to create such a network? Would this be interesting for you? What does the movement consist of in the US? (Media, Newspapers?)

Question 6

Because the Gülen movement is a non-profit organization I am curious to know how your institute is funded. Do you receive donations or government funding? What kinds of people or businesses fund your institute?

Question 7

The Gülen movement promotes dialogue with the other Abrahamic religions, Judaism and Christianity. What does the movement think about dialogue with non-religious/atheist/humanist groups?