

Understandings of "Community" within the Gülen Movement

In this paper I consider understandings of community as developed and articulated within the Gülen movement. The Gülen movement, also known as Hizmet (service), may be considered one of the branches of Turkey's broader Nur community, groups that derive inspiration from the life and writings of Said Nursi (d. 1960), in particular his Risale-i Nur. This movement takes guidance from the retired Islamic preacher, Fethullah Gülen, and is said to consist of some six million followers, almost all of whom are of Turkish origin. Beginning from a small circle in Izmir that crystallized around Gülen the late 1970s, the particular focus of this movement that emerged in the 1990s is service to humanity, especially in the fields of education and interfaith and intercultural dialogue.

Today the network of hundreds of schools established by this group stretches worldwide and expanding dialogue activities include outreach to major American cities. Initiatives are often centered around universities and cultural institutions as well as existing inter-religious dialogue platforms. Within Turkey the movement has the support, not only of university audiences and teachers in primary and secondary schools, but also of a network of businessmen who are long-term admirers of Mr. Gülen's activities in imparting Islamic values, bettering humanity and fostering peace and cooperation. The institutional reach of the movement now extends into many public sector realms in Turkey including media (TV and radio stations), industries that supply the extensive network of dormitories and schools (K through university), finance companies, bookstores and publishing houses.

An overview of these activities made by Hakan Yavuz some years ago is as follows:

Gulen's community is based on a complex web of business networks and controls a large media empire. It owns *Sizinti* (a scientific monthly), *Ekoloji* (an environment-related magazine), *Yeni Omit* (a theological journal), *Aksyon* (a weekly magazine), *Zaman* (a daily newspaper), *The Fountain* (English language religious publication), *Samanyolu TV*, and *Burc FM*. In addition to these media outlets, the community controls one of the fastest growing financial institutions, *Asya Finans*, which is backed by sixteen partners and has over half a billion US dollars in capital. Moreover, a powerful association of businessmen, *ISHAD* (is Hayatı Dayanışma Derneği), which includes over 2000 businessmen and merchants, supports Gulen's educational activities. This infrastructure also includes universities and colleges, high schools, dormitories, summer camps, and over 100 foundations. Day-to-day activities are organized by a hierarchical management based on the tenets of trust, obedience and duty to the community. This structure is composed of businessmen, teachers, journalists, and students. (Yavuz, 1999)

Religious movements as they develop in history express their identity through a range of symbolic and metaphorical images. In this way the relations of individual members to one another are regularized, sacralized and conceived as constituting a whole unit that is greater and more meaningful than the sum of its parts.

In the case of the Islamic tradition, the "umma", community or nation of Muslims is described in the Qur'an as "the best community brought out from among humanity" and as a "median or moderate community (*ummatun wasatatun*), and so on (Denny, 1977, 1985). At the same time, unlike the role of the church in Christianity which as a community of believers is metaphorically compared to the body of Christ in the world, a family, or a temple, the umma seems not to have been so extensively represented through the use of such metaphors. There is, however, the idea of the Muslims as the *Al-e Muhammad* which could

be taken in the more general sense as the "people of Muhammad" but also resonates more specifically with the idea of the "family". The alternative Islamic concept of "jama'at" or the collective body/community strongly evokes unity as in the hadiths which state that the "community will never agree on an error", "must stick together ", "is a mercy" and so on. These statements hold a powerful resonance for all Sunnis and for a movement such as Hizmet. Many of these same revealed sources are quoted by Gülen in articulating the spiritual or higher purpose of collective work and service. (Gülen, *Kırık Testi*, 2003, 200-1) According to L. Gardet it is the term jama'at in Islam that in particular focuses "attention of the bonds which fashion from a group of individuals a community of believers". (Gardet, 411)

In the case of the Gülen movement models abound for the understanding of the community, the relationship of members to one another and to the leader, and its purpose. There is a sense of mission and an aura of excitement at being involved in a successful and meaningful project which as it grows, expands the horizons of individuals, what they can accomplish as part of a greater entity, and the boundaries to which their efforts can reach. In fact, the Gülen community is both closely knit and at the same time dispersed. It is both hierarchical and egalitarian. As a movement that has experienced remarkable growth over the past generation, it is conscious of its evolving identity. Explanations and symbols of what binds members together play as important a role as the need to develop a language for presenting its identity to outsiders. The sources of these models are primarily Islamic, Sufi, and Turkish traditions.

In this paper I will therefore consider some types of metaphors and models for the community based on the writings of Fethullah Gülen and on interviews conducted with community

members in the United States and Turkey. The comparative study of religions leads us to observe that such models of community may be divided into those describing its function in social settings vs. those primarily derived from scriptural or philosophical resources. In the case of the Gülen movement, I further order these models based on those focusing on the role of the movement (Light House, cemaat, spiritual personality), the relationships of members to one another (family, school/madrassa), and the situation/location of the movement in space or time (Fifth Floor, Golden Generation, map).

Principles of the movement

Let me begin with an overview of some principles and characteristics of the Gülen movement as articulated by members.

One member (Enes Ergene) interviewed provided the following list of elements:

- 1) dialogue/tolerance (hoşgörü)
- 2) self-sacrifice and altruism (fedakarlık /feragat)
- 3) avoidance of political and ideological conflict
- 4) taking action on a positive and harmonious way
- 5) taking responsibility

Another model offered by a second community member, a senior businessman rather than an intellectual, was:

- 1) the first principle is belief
- 2) then self-sacrifice (fedakarlik)--with resources and self (mal ve can)

3) to have the affluent (businessmen) be the first to set examples. However such a supporter cannot just pay--one must pay and also "go".¹

4) to give with no expectation of praise or reward. For example a person should be in the first line to give and the last row to receive any reward or thanks.

5) humbleness. There should be neither individual nor communal boasting or blessings will be cut off.

These ideas are also reflected in explicit pronouncements of Gülen himself, for example the following passage from *Prizma 1*:

All of these depend on the existence of unpretentious people with no expectations (*hasbi*), and they are certainly a grace of God. Therefore, people must seriously train themselves in the direction of having no expectation of return (*hasbi*) and altruism. They must be unpretentious and just like the people during the Makkan period who could not see the season of victories, they should also free themselves from every kind of worldly expectations and seek the pleasure of God. They should never forget that God may not allow them to continue this work until the end. These people of courage should be loyal, but should never hold any expectation. This is because service (*hizmet*) is done not for the reward to be given here, but because it is God's order. If some reward is given here, then it should be regarded as *ulufe* (paid by the Sultan's to some soldiers), but it should never be attributed to any individuals.

Organization and recruitment

A senior member commented that:

"This is a movement of the heart, we are not a recruitment organization." (Enes Ergene, interview).

There is no formal process for joining the Gülen community. Members encounter the movement through contexts such as secondary or university educational settings or perhaps through contacts in

¹ Interview Ali Reza Tanrısever Aug. 2005 Istanbul.

their personal circle of relatives and acquaintances. In Hizmet they commit to a lifestyle of service anticipating possible assignments in remote areas such as Central Asia, Africa or the West; minimal remuneration and the expectation that they will regularly and consistently participate in personal edification through attending or leading study circles. In addition they may make regular supportive payments themselves and engage in fundraising along family and friends networks in order to support the group's broader mission.

Balci observes that there is no formal initiation and becoming a member of Hizmet is not like joining a sports club or political party. "There is no membership card, and no special ceremony when somebody becomes a fethullahci. Each member offers his or her services-hizmet-to help in the diffusion of the ideas of Nursi and Gülen. He or she accepts the mission given by the community. There are a number of degrees of membership in the community: an individual can be an active member, a simple member or a sympathizer." (Balci, 2003, 158)

Models for the movement are part of a self-exploration among members who find themselves very deeply committed to a movement whose organizational structural and style of networking are not overtly mapped out on organizational charts or lines of command. Whether this structure is organic, hierarchical, or other is debated in the scholarly literature. (Yavuz 1999, Agai 2003, 246 ff) and in commentary featured in the media outlets of the movement itself such as a series of articles by Ali Bulaç that appeared in the *Zaman* newspaper.

For example, Yavuz comments as follows:

The combination of business interests with Gulen's ideas is powerful both inside and outside Turkey. These networks, despite claims of a

central organization and a strict hierarchy, are rather loose networks of like-minded Turks, whose similar ideas are a result of their internalization of the writings of Said Nursi. (Yavuz, 1999)

One senior intellectual of the movement was told as he accepted his first assignment as a teacher by the school principal, "Avoid controversies as to your role, our group is organic. You are both your unique self and under guidance from the center." (Ali Ünal interview, 2005) The impression is, however, that as the movement grows it will require and cultivate its own specialists in all areas; organizers, administrators, educators, and activists and ultimately intellectuals and theorists. While this foundational period has primarily been one of activism, in Hizmet there will come a need for more intellectual activities." (Ibid)

The Community as a Family

Immediately accessible to persons familiar with Turkish culture is the metaphor of the community as a family. Within Hizmet, those who are competent to interpret the teachings are accorded the more venerable titles "older brother" (agabey: pronounced Abi in Turkish) or "older sister" (abla) in the case of females. (Agai, 2003, 68) These terms are also familiar within the Nur movement of the followers of Said Nursi who reflected on the role of elder brothers (abis) as follows:

Risale-i Nur students should not seek light outside the circle of the *Risale-i Nur*, and they cannot seek it. If they do so, they will find a lamp in place of the immaterial sun giving light through the window of the *Risale-i Nur*, and perhaps lose the sun.

Also, the pure and powerful 'way of friendship and brotherhood' within the circle of the *Risale-i Nur*, which gains numerous spirits for each

individual and through the mystery of the legacy of Prophethood shows the Companions' way of brotherhood, leaves no need for seeking a spiritual guide or father outside that sphere, in a way that is harmful to them in three respects; it provides many 'agabeys' that is, elder brothers, in place of a single father. The joint compassion of elder brothers makes that of a father as nothing. (Nursi, *Flashes*, 355).

The community of Said Nursi is said to have used (at least until the 1970s) terms for four levels of membership designated as "talebe" (student --for any new recruit), "kardeş" (brother), dost (friend--said to be the elite of the movement) and finally, varis (warith)² "heir" applied to a very small number who had been intimate companions of Nursi himself. (Balci, 2003, 93) Within the Gulen community there are other designations, not rigidly applied, but useful in giving us a sense of how seniority and authority is represented. For example, some of the most senior members of Gulen's circle receive the appellation of "Hoca" (teacher). The term Hoca is used for someone who has traditional religious knowledge and is a senior member with concomitant responsibilities. "Effendi", a Turkish cultural term of respect, has been applied to some of the activist businessmen. The term "Bey" may refer to someone in the second cohort of followers who is primarily an activist and organizer rather than an expert in Islamic religious learning, or it may be used for some of the senior circle of businessmen supporters.

The following quote reflects a study taking the position that the organization of the movement is hierarchical.

² It seems that varis may have a more general application in Gülen's thought. See *The Statues of our Souls : Revival in Islamic Thought and Activism*, (2005) which is an extended tafsir of a Qur'anic verse that presents this concept of "heirs" of the Prophet, a title naturally arrogated by many Islamic groups but usually accepted in relation to scholarly or mystical expertise.

First, the organizational structure of the movement is seen as hierarchical and somewhat non-democratic, which is somewhat unexpected given the community's liberal attitudes and tolerance of differences. Gulen is the sole leader of the movement and the hierarchical order extends from the top to the bottom through an increasing number of abiler (elder brothers). The ranking is very strict and each rank's abi (elder brother) obtains only a certain amount of knowledge of the activities occurring or under discussion while agreeing to refrain from asking questions or seeking more knowledge about the higher ranks. An abi or someone under his supervision may, however, talk to other abis informally and also talk to those assigned to overseeing the activities. Although this sort of structure may be helpful if the members of the community were to face persecution by the government, it does raise serious problems for the development of democracy within the group and creates the likelihood that many followers are left out of the decision making process. Of course, those entering into this structure do so of their own free will. (Aras 2000).

Gulen's followers consult Hocaeffendi about their respective fields and projects. However, his role is not so much a planner but rather a visionary, especially since in new regions locally operating groups are better acquainted with needs and realities on the ground.

In Turkey, as the movement has grown in the educational and dialogue spheres, organization units take charge of the needs in certain regions for example, Central Asia and the United States. From here they oversee logistics such as obtaining proper visas and documents, assigning teaching staff and activists to a regions, and even supplying necessary materiel.

Bassam Tibi deprecatingly referred to the Gülen movement as a Sufi tariqa including as a critique that Fethullah Gülen functions as the shaykh (Sufi master). (Tibi, 93) Bekim Agai concludes that this is a misrepresentation because unlike classical tariqa Sufism, there is no requirement of initiation,

no restricted or esoteric religious practices, and no arcane Sufi terminology that marks membership in the Gülen community. (Agai, 2003, 19 ff) Enes Ergene also strongly disagrees with the characterization of the movement as a *tariqa* in any classical social or organizational sense although he feels that Gülen as an individual thinker could be considered a "contemporary Sufi". (Ergene, 357)

Agai then explores the applicability of the term "cemaat", the Turkish equivalent of the Arabic *jama'at* (community), to the movement. Enes Ergene spends considerable time developing the organization and theoretical elements of the term *cemaat* and its applicability to Hizmet. (Ergene, 333-46)

Some members of the Gülen movement have preferred to characterize themselves as a (civil social movement) "sivil toplum hareketi" although Agai feels that this glosses over the religious dimension of their commitment and activities. (Agai, 2003, 19) For example, the Turkish intellectual Ali Bulaç has investigated the valence of the term *cemaat* in the context of modernization and industrialization. (Bulaç, 2000). Agai's current paper describes the term as follows:

The emergence of the *cemaat* as a new form of Islamic self-organization is moreover linked to the urbanization process in Turkey, which weakened classical kin relations and former forms of organization such as the Islamic brotherhoods (Özdalga 2005, 435). The *cemaat* is a specific network where relations and discourse are strongly influenced by models put forward by the founder, trying to form an alternative atmosphere of socialization within the secular Republican context. (Agai, 2005).

According to Gülen, the *cemaat* is a unity of individuals, sharing the same feeling, thoughts, ideals, aims and ideas and adjusting their life along this line of unity (Gülen 1997d: 173; 1997e: 252). We have talked about the organizational impact of the *cemaat* before. For Gülen the *cemaat* is very important as it helps the individual to enhance the

religious productivity through joint work. It helps to profit from the good deeds, which are achieved with others and helps to avoid individual mistakes on the worldly path to God. Being very limited in one's possibilities of action as an individual, the *cemaat* helps its followers to overcome these limits and cope with the world outside, which tries to distract the believer from his belief (Gülen 1997e: 174; Gülen 1997f: 77.) For Gülen the *cemaat* creates synergy - in the *cemaat*, 1+1 becomes 11, 1+1+1 becomes 111 (Gülen 1995: 90).³ Like this it enhances the spiritual and worldly success of its members. The *cemaat* is constituted through joint reading in the so called *ders*, where the ideas of Fethullah Gülen are given meaning in different contexts. This may be done wherever the followers convene. (Ibid)

Alternatively, Agai finds the Turkish word "örgüt" (organization) to be inapplicable to the movement. (Agai, 2003)

The movement in terms of ideal student/ teacher relationships

A model that fits some aspects of the organization is one drawn from Islamic education, the classical madrasa or Islamic school that is then broadened to a secular context in which teachers care deeply for the personal welfare and moral edification of their pupils.

In Gülen's rhetoric, the schoolteacher becomes prophet, fulfilling the mentioned Islamic principles by imparting secular school knowledge. (Agai 2005).

Fethullah Gülen's own training was in a madrasa setting and his writings reflect the Ottoman Turkish intellectual tradition and the body of classical works studied in that environment. For most of the generation of businessmen and activists following

³ This example is originally found in Nursi, *Flashes*, 215.

Gülen in the early period this knowledge, as well as competence in Arabic was remote. In a certain sense, then, we see a revival of this classical learning tradition occurring at the core of the Gülen movement through the training of a special group of pupils selected by the senior Abis. These students are then sent for a number of years to study in an intimate residential setting with Gülen himself. Recruits are primarily graduate students in Turkish theology faculties who have a good command of the Arabic language. Perhaps seven or eight students are chosen each year (Interview, Cemal Türk).

According to one interviewee who has passed through this system, the 1st year students simply listen and may achieve results through peer learning. In subsequent years they are increasingly able to participate in the lessons and ask direct questions. The curriculum includes heavy tomes of Hanafi fiqh, for example in one year a 14 volume commentary (sharh) on al-Tirmidhi by the contemporary Indian scholar, Mubarakpuri (Interview, Enes Ergene) or *Umdat al-Qari* of al-Ayni (25 volumes), but also in every year at least one work of classical Sufism such as al-Muhasibi or al-Qushayri. (Interview, Cemal Türk)

The works of Said Nursi and many of Gülen's books and speeches are steeped in the late Ottoman synthesis of philosophy, mysticism, and acumen in commentary on classical religious sources including Qur'an and hadith. The embodiment in the activities of the movement of classical adab, gender decorum, etc., also creates a certain atmosphere while the role of discussions in frequent study circles creates a sort of "imagined

madrasa"⁴ for those modern Turks seeking to spiritualize and Islamize their personal and social worlds.

Light House

A further symbol related to the educational and inspirational function of the group is "Işık evi" (light house).

The places where the followers meet regularly are called the "houses of light" (ışık evleri). They form the core of the entire network. As the *cemaat* carries a special religious meaning, the *houses of light* do as well.

Gülen calls the *ışık evleri* a tree, the seed of which was planted in the times of the Prophet Muhammad himself (1997e: 12). He sees their roots within the Qur'an (24/36f) itself (Gülen 1997g: 2.), thus giving the *cemaat's* own form of organization the highest Islamic virtue. For Gülen the *ışık evleri* are the essence of Islamic education par excellence and are viewed to be the basis for the educational activities (Gülen 1998e: 193). This gives the teachers a high religious prestige. (Agai, 2005)

Balci describes the houses of light as "flats rented by the *cemaat* or purchased by *cemaat* businessmen where poor students--usually from poor families--are allowed to stay during their studies. Each "house of light" is under the direction of an *abi* (older brother) who helps to educate the students." (Balci, 2003, 158).

Beyond this more concrete and specific role of the light houses, they are compared to the ideal functions of *madrasa*, *tekyes*, and *zawiyas* which they are said to revive and combine. Their function of "ihya" (revival) is now said to have expanded from Anatolia to the world. (Gülen, 2004?)

⁴ In a passage from Gülen cited later in this paper one finds explicit language of a "transcendental dervish lodge" (*tekye*) and "madrasa beyond the

Location in Space and Time

The movement in Gülen's outlook from Ottoman/Turkish nationalism to a more global and even universal perspective may be represented by "the map story". In my interviews I heard the story as follows.

On the wall in his dormitory room, Hoca Effendi used to have a map of the Ottoman empire with the inscription 'you are still in my dreams'.

Later this was exchanged for a world map and finally for a satellite view from space' (Interview Ali Riza Tanrisever, Aug. 2005).

As Gülen's own vision expanded from the local Turkish context in the 90s with the new educational projects in the ex-Soviet republics and the initiation of dialogue with non-Muslims, his followers also broadened their horizons. For example, when outreach to non-religious Turks commenced, one follower explained how Hoca Effendi told followers to distinguish the *dinsiz* (non-religious) from the *din-düşmanı* (enemies of religion). (Interview, Davut Ay)

At the same time, negative impressions of Gülen's use of the Ottoman and world map as suggesting an imperialistic drive to expansionism were noted by Ünal Bilir. (2004, 270 as reported by journalist Nuriye Akman in *Sabah* in the mid-1990s).

Following the way of Said Nursi, co-existence and cooperation with the Turkish state and the majority is the ideal of Gülen and his community. The context of the movement's

attitude toward the Turkish state and that of Nur groups generally is outlined by Hakan Yavuz as follows:

The Nurcus are generally more predisposed to tolerance, electoral politics, moderation and a market economy than other Islamic groups, such as the Virtue (Fazilet) Party. There are two contradictory reasons for this. Said Nursi always stressed the religious consciousness of the individual as the sine qua non for communal realization of a just society, and the conception of the state as being absolutely necessary for the survival of society. According to the Nurcus, religion is primarily a private or communal matter as opposed to a political or state matter. Their understanding of Islam is very much conditioned by the experiences of the Ottoman state and the Republic of Turkey. . . . (Yavuz, 1999)

Symbols of space and time used to situate the movement are thus subject to negotiation and reinterpretation depending on the audience and on the expanding horizons of its outreach activities.

The Golden Generation

In conversation, a senior activist in the movement described its activism in terms of a relay race in which the current generations are running and passing the torch or flag on to the next cohort. Sighing, he explained how they have to try and run very quickly because previous generations had lagged behind. My interpretation is that the symbolism of the flag that was not being carried fast enough was somewhat ambiguous--does it represent Islam, morality, service, etc.? Various participants would probably construe the nature of the torch that is being carried differently--but all would agree on the need to make all efforts and sacrifices-(fedakarlık)--to bear it onward and on high.

An explicit term used by Gülen for the aspiration to train future cohorts is the "Golden Generation" (altın nesil). This concept has historical resonance with the Islamic idea of the "best generations" of early Muslims. Within the evolving discourse of nesil or "back to roots" the Golden generation has been transformed from a specifically Turkish Islam to a universal ideal. (Agai, 2003, 255) An entire conference was convened on this topic in 1977, the proceedings of which are available on two cassette tapes or CDs. Key concepts articulated in those sessions were the idea of inner self-evaluation (muhasaba) and terminology such as love, friendliness (dostane), self-control, and reflection (muraqaba). The Sufi influence in these formulations is quite clear. The Golden Generation is also seen as the antithesis of the chaos and hopelessness that often marks the current age. (Agai, 2003, 255)

According to Gülen's own articulation of the "Golden generation" concept:

I have always dreamed of a generation with minds enlightened by positive science, with hearts purified by faith, who would be an example of virtue and who would burn with the desire to serve their nation and humanity, and who would live, not for themselves, but for others. Inspired by the verse and hadith I just mentioned, I called them the "Altın Nesil" (Golden Generation). I described the characteristics of this generation twenty-two years ago in conferences I gave in some cities. This is an expression that I coined and used. But without making any distinctions it's being used in the accusations for all the activities done by our Muslim people. This strange situation shows how well things are or are not understood. (Gülen, *Aksyon*, 1998)

Balci describes the significance of the "Golden Generation" in terms of the educational activities of the movement.

The concept of altın nesil (the Golden generation) is an important one for Gülen and his followers. The aim is to provide "a perfect education for a perfect generation in order to obtain a perfect society". "Altın nesil" also requires the young people of the community to show a great respect for religious and national values. This generation has to be modern and disciplined. The community therefore offers its members the best schools and the best teachers (Balci, 2003, 159).

Some criticism of the altın nesil concept has come from the Turkish left in terms of its potential for inculcating neo-conservative and elitist attitudes. (Bilir, 2005, 265) There is also some question as to whether its meaning is context specific depending on whether the audience is within or outside Turkey, and what its political implications might be. Agai sees the Golden Generation as constructing an alternate version of modernity in which religion will remain an essential component, thereby contesting the sociological theories of Marx, Durkheim and Weber (Agai, 2004, 256).

As in other elements of Gülen's thought, the Golden Generation concept has evolved from a nationalistic project of saving Turkey to a project of offering hope to the entire world through imbuing the pursuit of science and progress with spiritual and moral values. (Agai, 2002, 36-7). While the term "Golden Generation" evokes the hadith that the early generations of Muslims were the best and a model for those who come later, in Gülen's thought this admiration of tradition persists along with an evocation of "hope" that a "new generation" may restore and recover what has been lost, and perhaps even continue to evolve, at least in the sphere of scientific knowledge and accomplishment.

This role for the Golden Generation may be seen in the discussion of the "two books" respectively the books of revelation and nature, according to a classical Islamic

interpretation, that must be studied for interpreting the signs of God. While previous Muslim thinkers stated that the neglect of the book of nature would be a source of punishment in this world, Gülen adds the interpretation that this neglect will merit punishment in the hereafter as well because the backwardness of Muslims will lead others to reject them and the religion as well. (Interview Cemal Türk, 2005)

Fifth Floor (Beşinci Kat)

Another designation for aspects of the Gülen movement that carries a special spatial referent is the "fifth floor" (Beşinci Kat). (Gülen, *Işığın Görüldüğü Ufuk* #7, 196) This originally referred to the top floor of a dormitory in which Hoca Effendi was taking refuge during a period of keeping a "low profile" in the mid 1980s. This period is remembered fondly by the senior students who had to humbly serve any guests that came so that they would not develop a "hoca" mentality. (Reşit Haylamaz, Interview, 2005) It also has the sense of representing "another world" so that its interpretation could be further related to the concept of levels of heaven, as in the Mi'raj. Indeed the atmosphere of the fifth floor represents a "sacred space" in which, for example, followers would cultivate angelic attitudes. The number "five" in itself is not supposed to be significant, Gülen states that it could be the fifteenth floor, for example; it is rather the concept of "height" or sublimity that is important. (Ibid, 197) Gülen reflects on this period as an ideal one of happiness and peace. It also represents an experience of a spiritual retreat, and a vantage point at which he received inspiration of future projects as seen on the horizons from the terrace of the fifth floor. It is also remembered as the time of

his deepest contemplations and self-accountings, a formative and inspired period in the development of the movement. (Ibid, 210).

The "fifth floor" motif would be an element of identity generally known to insiders only. I therefore suggest that among the designations and metaphors for community we may intuit a movement from exoteric social definitions to esoteric/spiritual symbols for the group.

The Collective Personality (shakhs-i manevi)

While Hizmet is avowed not to be a Sufi tariqa, the influence of mysticism, in particular Ottoman currents in the Naqshbandi and Mevlevi Orders, as well as the ecstatic love of dervishes epitomized by Yunus Emre and Rumi has a role. According to one member, "Sufism is not separate, spirituality is not separate" in the Gülen movement. Both Hoca Effendi and Said Nursi (Ustad) gave attention to prayers, tahajjud, and jawshan /tasbihat. We are the heirs of the Sufis." (Interview, Ali Ünal) For example, reading circles of persons working in the Institute of translation and publishing in Çamlıca divide up cycles of litanies to be read over certain periods and therefore have a simultaneous individual and communal devotional prayer life along with their work environment and commitments, and of course their participation in the obligatory Islamic prayers. The collection of litanies, *al-Qulub al-Dariya* from *Majmu'at al-Ahzab*⁵ prepared by the Turkish shaykh and scholar, **Gümüshanevi**, has been issued

⁵*Al-Qulub al-Daria*, (Imploring Hearts) is a collection of prayers and formulas of remembrance which have developed in many Sufi traditions under the guidance of great Sufi masters. The original work was compiled by the famous Ottoman scholar Ahmed Ziyauddin Gümüshanevi (1813-1893). Being a Sufi master himself, Gümüshanevi compiled his three-volume work *Majmuat al-Ahzab* after meticulous research. The prayers in *Imploring Hearts* are selections by Fethullah Gülen from Gümüshanevi's compilation. In *Imploring Hearts*, you will find invocations of Imam Ghazali, Abd al-Qadir Jilani, Ahmad Rufai, Hasan Shadhali, Shah Naqshband, Muhyi al-Din ibn Arabi, Imam Rabbani and others.

by the movement for purposes such as these individual and collective devotions. In addition periodic "camps" are held within various units and regions for members to enjoy fellowship, hear motivational and educational speakers, and pray and worship together.

The important concept of the movement as the shakhs-i manevi, the spiritual person (represented by a collective body) is addressed explicitly by Gülen in *Prizma 1* as an answer to a questioner who inquired about the role of the renewer (Mujaddid). "Do you think the three stages of faith, life, and Islam will be represented by one Mujaddid?"

Hoca Effendi answers:

There is no Mujaddid (renewer) presently. All of them have passed on having completed their mission. Today what is left behind as a duty for us is to recognize them and make sound assessments of their interpretations and perspectives. All of them and especially "the sage of the age" (Bediuzzaman) never drew attention to themselves when they started service to belief and the Qur'an and they understood this phenomenon as a "collective) spiritual body" (shakhs manevi) rather than a [particular] personality (shakhis), in the sense that after this, service to belief and Islam would be represented by the "[collective] spiritual personality".

According to Gülen's definition "spiritual [collective] personality" is not equated with an individual person. Rather the "shakhs-i manevi" stands for a community who are representative of what a mujaddid is expected to do. Some translate the term "shakhs-i manevi" as "the collective mind" while Shukran Vahide translates it as "collective personality." Shakhs-i manevi, therefore, comprehends both the "spiritual" and "collective" elements of community in the sense that this

function is not the sole purview of any one person, nor of a concrete entity or structure. The concept is not limited to the human species but also is applied in terms of animate and inanimate species and entities that are said in the Qur'an to praise Allah with the "tongue of its condition) (lisan-i hal), and who in turn are supported by angelic forces. (Ergene, 363-4)

At the same time any inordinate focus on one person in a personality cult is disparaged.

"Otherwise, all (personal) talents and gifts should be shattered like a crystal bowl; and the '[collective] spiritual personality' should always be indicated as the foundation." (Ibid)

In the next paragraph of this selection, Gülen explains how fondness and respect for a particular individual may yet be a positive means for uniting a community and encouraging them to service. This is very revealing, both in terms of the concept of community generally, and in terms of how Gülen understands his role as leader and the attitudes and responsibilities it conveys.

Meanwhile, there are some individuals who have become the lifeblood of a community out of a respect arising from the bottom; you can observe the presence of such individuals in every part of the structure top to bottom, although they are "nothing." However, if these individuals are beneficial to the community even at a tiniest level, then it is not worth causing troubles for them. Such individuals become an idol, if they cannot provide guidance for the society, construct the spirit of revival at a desired level, embrace every section of the society and be in harmony with them, and can only get along with those who respect them; such idols should be brought down. It is unacceptable that these individuals are capable of representing the "collective spiritual personality" if they cannot work in harmony even with those "pharaohs" within the society.

If such individuals are equipped with some sincerity (ihlas), when they realize they cannot be in harmony with the entire society, they would go into a self-denial and would bury themselves in an "individual absence" (ferdiyet gaybubeti), like Ibrahim Adhem did, in order to find out their own souls. Otherwise, being at the head of such service may place this person in a risk to lose some of the things they possess. (*Prizma*, 128-9)

Here we may discern some of the deep Sufi philosophical roots of these concepts. Terms such as the perfect human (insan-i kamil) and the macrocosmic person (shakhs-i akbar) are central to the theosophical Sufism of Ibn Arabi and followers of his school such as al-Jili. (Chittick, Nicholson) Turkish Sufism absorbed these concepts. In the modern Sufi thought of Said Nursi the religious idea of the Mujaddid and even the Mahdi are refocused from being expectations of a specific personality to representing a more collective sense of purpose. (Nursi, *Shualar (Rays)*, 559; Saritoprak, 2002)

The roles of qutbiyyat [being the axis or pole]/ghausiyyat [being the source of help] and ferdiyyet [solitariness] are also drawn from classical Sufi understandings of high exemplars of spirituality, in particular, Ibn Arabi's *Futuh al-Makkiya*. In fact, Said Nursi, working within this tradition, during his "old Said" period, thought that the role of the *Risala-i Nur* was to be one of the two Imams (leaders/guides) that must be present in the world at the level below the Ghaus-e Azam (Greatest Help) at all times. He writes how he later realized that the collective personality of the *Risala-i Nur* and of its true students manifests the spiritual station of the "ferid" (and thus has a certain spiritual independence from the Qutb). He declares that in these times the state of "ferdiyat" will be present along with the Qutbiyyet (pivotal role) and Ghausiyyet (salvific capacity, help) of the Ghaus-e Azam (Greatest Help). (Nursi, *Kastomonu*

Lahikası Mektup #121 p. 1644.) One might understand this symbolism as simultaneously Sufi and apocalyptic. It evokes a concept of mystical service, and also the Sufi idea of a "hidden government" of saints that support the world of whom the Qutb or Pole was supposed to be the highest "wali" (saint) of any age. Thus in this model of the collectivity we encounter an idea somewhat similar to that of the "community of saints".

The passage about retiring from leadership in a state of "absent solitariness" (*fard ghaybubeti*) is here related by Gülen to the hagiography of Ibrahim ibn Adham, a king who is said to have renounced his worldly status in order to follow the Sufi path to God. It also seems to foreshadow the option of Gülen assuming a less public role if put into a position of conflict with the authorities.

In his continuation of the answer to the question, Fethullah Gülen elaborates on how some of these special roles of saints might play out in the current age and in relationship to the collective spiritual personality concept.

Turning back to the original question, even though the renewer (Mujaddid) had been awaited as a single individual, at a time when the world has become more global and we are experiencing a "shrinking" of distances both in time and space (*taqarub-u zaman* and *taqarub-u makan*), and masses apparently living far apart have become members of the same household, service to humanity (*hizmet*) should be undertaken, not by exceptional individuals (*ferd-i ferdiler*), but rather by the collective [spiritual] body (*shakhs-i manevi*). Those who will constitute the *shakhs-i manevi* might be persons drawn from a wide spectrum; from those who participate to the smallest degree to those whose contribution is unimaginably great and who cooperate with everyone in perfect harmony. This service will not involve people with specialities; however, some special people will be the teachers of this communal school; they will be the "individual par excellence" (*ferd-i-ferid*) individuals of the transcendental dervish lodge (*tekve*) of this age; they will be the head

teachers of the madrasa beyond these times; they will be the commanders of this collective barracks.

I believe that today the (spiritual ranks of) the Qutb and Fard are primarily represented by the collective spiritual bodies. At certain times, the ranks of Qutb and Ghaus are conjoined, whereas the rank of Qutb al-Irshad (Pole of Guidance) might have several representations, for it is related to guidance (irshad). The Autad (pillars) will perhaps be represented within this collective understanding or will assume the role of the lifeblood of a sacred and absolute unity that will be achieved either through uniting with this collective understanding or through spreading among all Islamic communities/groups (jamaats).

There are countless righteous saints of sevens, or forties⁶ who are climbing the stairs of Qutb al-Irshad. Even though they appear disconnected, one day they will certainly reach a point of intersection. Our master the Messenger of God (pbuh) says, "Souls are soldiers lined up in ranks; they come together as much as they know each other." People who share the same soul, the same meaning, and the same thought will certainly unite, even though they are far apart, just like rivers flowing into the same sea, reaching the target sometimes by carving into mountains or by finding out different routes when their paths are blocked by visible or hidden obstructions; or like those who have intended for pilgrimage may meet at Arafat, Mataf, or Rawza. It does not matter if they had the intention to meet or not, the domains they would like to do services at will unite them, and they will represent this grand truth with a hope-inspiring "collective gathering" (cemm-I gafir). (Gülen, *Prizma 1* , 130)

⁶ This refers to the classical models of the Hidden Government in which there are ranks of saints: one Qutb (axis, pole) or Ghauth (help), 4 Autad (pillars), 7 Abrar (pious), and 40 Abdals (substitutes). Below this are 300 akhyar (Good) and 4000 Hidden saints. (Schimmel, 1975, 200). See also Chodkiewicz, 1993 for a more detailed discussion of Ibn Arabi's theories about these ranks of sainthood. According to Ibn Arabi the afrad (solitary ones) are situated at the same spiritual level as the Pole (Qutb) and are not subject to his authority except when invested with a specific function. (Ibid, 107).

The importance of the collectivity of the spiritual personality/body was emphasized by Said Nursi in the following words:

Just as one of a person's hands cannot be jealous of the other, and his eye cannot envy his ear, and his heart cannot compete with his reason, so that each if you is like one sense, one member of the collective personality of the totality that we make up. It is not to be rivals to one another on the contrary, to take pride and pleasure in one another's good qualities is a basic obligation springing from the conscience".
(Nursi, *Letters* 29th Letter: sixth section, 498)

At the same time, there still remains the possibility of individual perfection according to Gülen's thought, for example in his understanding of the Sufi concept of the Perfect Human (insan-i kamil) as in the expression "How to elevate each individual to the rank of a universal, perfect, being (al-insan al-kamil)--a true human being." (Gülen, *Sufism*, xx) This individual perfection causes the person to "have a 'universal' nature that can represent the entire creation and what is best in it." (Ibid)

Though this spirit of devotion, self-sacrifice and becoming a "Muslim for others" every person has the potential to become an "insan-i kamil". (Interview, Enes Ergene). In terms of individual development, one intellectual described a concept of two higher levels of spiritual development left to personal choice which he termed the "mi'raj (ascension) of the heart" and the "intellectual mi'raj". (Interview, Enes Ergene) The general call to become heirs "varis" to the prophetic tradition, may also be seen as opening the path to becoming the "perfect human being" to all members of the community. (Gülen, 2005) Still there seems to be a strong anti-individualistic caution in discussions of the collective person. "From another aspect in our times no single

individual on their own can attain such a stage (makam). Indeed, we can only seize the heights through affiliating with the collective personality." (Gülen, *Fasıldan Fasıla* 1, 172)

The transition from a microcosmic to macrocosmic consciousness is also part of the "perfect human" model. Said Nursi identifies the collective spiritual personality with the perfect human.

And so, O *Risale-i Nur* students and servants of the Qur'an! You and I are members of a collective personality such as that worthy of the title of 'perfect man.' (*Flashes*, 215)

The Prophet Muhammad is the perfect model for Sufis and through "fana fi rasul" (annihilation or identification of the personal ego with the model of the Prophet) one may progress to "fana fi'l Allah", (mystical annihilation in the Divine will). "Fana fi-shaykh" (annihilation in the spiritual guide) in later Sufism was often the preliminary step to annihilation in the Prophet. One intellectual in the Gülen movement related this to a further idea of "fana fi-l Ikhwan" (annihilation in the community [brothers]). (Interview Enes Ergene, 2005)

This idea of "annihilation in the community" has been expressed in Said Nursi's *Flashes*:

YOUR FOURTH RULE

This is to imagine your brothers' virtues and merits in your own selves, and to thankfully take pride at their glory. The Sufis have terms they use among themselves, "annihilation in the shaykh," "annihilation in the Prophet;" I am not a Sufi, but these principles of theirs make a good rule in our way, in the form of "annihilation in the brothers." Among brothers this is called "tafânî;" that is, "annihilation in one another." That is to say, to forget the feelings of one's own carnal soul, and live in one's mind with one's brothers' virtues and feelings.

In any event, the basis of our way is brotherhood. It is not the means which is between father and son, or shaykh and follower. It is the means of true brotherhood. At the very most a Master [Ustad] intervenes. Our way is the closest friendship. This friendship necessitates being the closest friend, the most sacrificing companion, the most appreciative comrade, the noblest brother. The essence of this friendship is true sincerity. (Nursi, *Flashes*, 215)

Thus we see a development in Gülen's discussion of the shakhs-i manevi from a focus on the individual guide (shaykh) to a focus on the community as a transformative agent.

In later Sufism the collectivity of saints united with angelic forces (mala al-a'la) were sometimes understood as participating in a sort of cosmic evolution (Hermansen 1996, 43-52) that worked against the more pessimistic and confrontational elements present in classical Islamic eschatology that features, for example, the messianic Mahdi who participates in a cosmic battle, the evocation of distinctively anti-pluralistic imagery, and after all, the destruction of the world as we know it.

In summary, we conclude that the Gülen community has developed a rich array of symbolic self-understandings and representations. This variety fulfills the need for creating a sense of unity and collective identification beyond the interests and experiences of individual members. At the same time it generates a cosmology indicating how the community fits into a spiritualized mystical structure, and simultaneously participates in the creative evolution of its purpose in space and time.

Bibliography

Abu Rabi, Ibrahim. *Islam at the Crossroads. on the life and thought of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi* Albany : State University of New York Press, 2003.

Agai, Bekim, *Zwischen Netzwerk und Diskurs: Das Bildungsnetzwerk um Fethullah Gülen* Schenefeld: EB Verlag, 2004.

-----."Fethullah Gülen and his Movement's Islamic Ethic of Education" Critique: critical Middle Eastern Studies (11, #1 Spring 2002): 27-48.

-----. unpublished paper presented at this symposium (2005).

Aras, Bulent and Omer Caha "Fethullah Gülen and his Liberal "Turkish Islam" Movement" *Middle East Review of International Affairs* (MERIA) Volume 4, No. 4 December 2000.

Balci, Bayram, "Fethullah Gülen's Missionary Schools in Central Asia and their Role in the Spreading of Turkism and Islam" *Religion, State & Society* (31, # 2 June 2003: 151 - 177.

-----. *Missionnaires de l'islam en Asie centrale: Les Ecoles turques de Fethullah Gülen* Paris : Maisonneuve et Larose, 2003.

Bilir, Ünal. "'Turkey-Islam': Recipe for Success or Hindrance to the Integration of the Turkish Diaspora Community in Germany" *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs* (24, #2, Oct. 2004): 259-283.

Bulaç, Ali. "Tarikat ve Cemaat", *Zaman*, 22.07.2000.

-----. "Modern cemaatler"

-----. "Cemaatin modern karakteri"

-----. "Cemaat ve cemiyet"

Chittick, William, "The five divine presences: from al-Qunawi to al-Qaysari". *Muslim World* (72, Ap 1982): 107-128.

Chodkiewicz, Michel. *Seal of the Saints: Prophethood and Sainthood in the doctrine of Ibn 'Arab'i* Cambridge : Islamic Texts Society, 1993.

Denny Frederick M. "The Umma" *Numen* 24 (1977): 26-59.

-----."Ethics in the Qur'an: Community and World View" in *Islamic Ethics* Malibu, 1985.

Ergene, M. Enes. *Geleneğin Modern Çağa Tanıklığı* İstanbul, Yeni Akademi, 2005.

Gardet, Louis. "Djamâ'at" in *Encyclopedia of Islam* IV, 411-3 Leiden: E.J. Brill.

Gülen, Fethullah, *Prizma 1* İzmir; Nil 1995.

----- . *Fasildan Fasila 1* İzmir: Nil, 1995.

----- . *Fasildan Fasila 2* İzmir: Nil, 1995.

----- . *Key Concepts in the Practice of Sufism* Fairfax, VA: Fountain, 1999.

----- . *Işığın Görüngüsü Ufuk* (Çağ ve Nesil-7) İstanbul: Nil, 2002.

----- . *Kırık testi*, İstanbul: Zaman Kitap, 2003.

----- . *The Statues of our Souls: Revival in Islamic Thought and Activism* (New Jersey: Light, 2005.

----- ."Işık Evler (1)" *Sızıntı*, (Vol. 13, Ocak 1992): 156.

<http://tr.fgulen.com/a.page/eserleri/cag.ve.nesil.serisi/gunler.bahari.soluklarken/a361.html>

----- ."Dünden Bugüne Işık Evler" 2004?

<http://tr.fgulen.com/a.page/eserleri/prizma/perspektif/a696.html>

----- . "Claims and Answers" *Aksiyon*, 06.06.1998 , Claim #19.

<http://en.fgulen.com/a.page/press/interview/a1216p2.html> Viewed Nov. 2, 2005.

----- . "Altın Nesil". Conference 2 CDs. (1977) İstanbul: Nil Productions, 2003.

Gümüşhanevi, Ahmed Ziyaeddin (compiled by Akademi Araştırma Heyeti) *Qulub al-Daria* İstanbul: Işık Yayınları, 2005..

Hermansen Marcia. *The Conclusive Argument from God: Shah Wali Allah of Delhi's Hujjat Allah al-Baligha* Leiden: Brill, 1996.

Said Nursi, *Risale-Nur. Words (CD version)*

-----*.Letters*

-----*. Kastomonu Lahikasi Mektub #121 p. 1644.*

Schimmel, Annemarie *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*, University of North Carolina, 1975.

Saritoprak, Zeki, ""The Mahdi Tradition in Islam: A Social-Cognitive Approach" in *Islamic Studies* XLI (# 4: 2002): 651-674.

Tibi Bassam *Aufbruch am Bosphorus. Die Türkei zwischen Europa and Islamismus* Munchen: Diana, 1998.

Yavuz, M Hakan "Towards an Islamic liberalism? The Nurcu movement and Fethullah Gulen" *Middle East Journal* (53, # 4 Autumn 1999): 584-605.

Yavuz, Hakan M.; Esposito, John L. eds. *Turkish Islam and the Secular State. The Gülen Movement.* Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2003.

Interviews. Istanbul 2005

Enes Ergene

Ali Ünal

Ali Rıza Tanrısever

Davut Ay

Cemal Türk

Reşit Haylamaz

Marcia Hermansen

Loyola University Chicago