

Mobilization and Countermobilization: The Gülen Movement in Turkey

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This paper explores the attitudes of those opposed or indifferent to the Gülen Movement (GM) in Turkey. It pays particular attention to ongoing shifts in understanding the nature of the Turkish public sphere and civil society.

The goal of this analysis is to examine how innovation and reform are introduced in the Turkish public sphere and the growing capacity of Turkish civil society to accept change. This approach highlights the importance of an open civil society and of public spaces that provide an arena for peaceful political and religious encounters. It is also intended to facilitate an understanding of the creation of consensus, providing people with new insights towards developing their capacity for action.

Background

In Turkey, important transformations are taking place in different sectors of the state apparatus and society¹. The pressures of social changes and the increasing autonomization of the political system have brought into light crises in the traditional functioning of bureaucratic institutions.

Particular features have been emphasized by observers when describing the management of the political system in Turkey: special interventions under the pressure of particularist demands, the clientelistic management of power, compromise with the traditional elite, the unabashed spending of public funds for political purposes, the diversion of publicly owned industry to private gain, state economic enterprises, state agencies, and the banking system by political entities, and the partisan control of information and the media. Within the so-

¹ For more, see Eickelman, 1998:80.

called elitist-statist-secular attitudes of the dominating logic, the heterogeneous block of interests have mobilized around certain parties, while the existing logic of Turkey's model of development, the imbalances between the eastern and western Turkey, the state of separation and exclusion that exists between the status quo and the traditional and modernizing groups, the need for faith and the role of Islam, and the place and significance of civic initiatives have been rarely called into question. At the same time, it has become necessary to respond piecemeal to the demands that have been created by development. Hence, Turkish citizens are convinced of the failure of reformist policies and the ineffectiveness of the multitude of specific and particularistic legislative provisions. (Aliriza, 2000:2-5; 2001:1-5)

Turkish society, therefore, needs to be directed to and transformed by institutionalization, the selection and renewal of modernizing personnel in organizations, democratization, globalization, the disengagement of traditional antagonistic elites and demands, and the acknowledgement of Islam as a guide for the spiritual well being of people (Kramer, 2000:91). Whoever wants to research the Gülen movement should try to define the contested social field, identify the new forms of power, locate the dominant discourse, investigate the new elites, and expose the contradictions that actors seek to camouflage to gain support or legitimize their action.

Public Space and Making New Issues Visible

Whenever collective action raises and openly addresses the central issues affecting society there appears to be a chance to redefine public space. Yet, as soon as a new theme is introduced to the public sphere, it meets new limits (Melucci, 1999:177). The cultural dimension, because so much of it is implicit and taken for granted, is the most difficult to alter.

Gülen acknowledges that the cultural dimension has been an important component of any national consciousness; its development and rise follow its own special line. He sees a close

relationship between the harmony and stability of the life of a nation and its cultural resources:

*Culture is born from such factors as a community's language, manner, customs and art, and later, by being worked and reworked, it becomes the society's style of life, the totality of a number of principles among which almost every piece is very important. Avoiding seeing these principles is blindness, and trying to remove them from society means total confusion.*²

Mobilizations develop in order to protect culture and to restore its vitality (Melucci, 1999:156). By mobilizing cultural and universal elements within Turkish society, the GM attempts to address the needs of a complex society, and acts towards global integration within a well-established heritage. The basis of cultural traditions is utilized to create new symbolic systems in which the codes and languages of the past are used to express the needs of complex societies (Gülen, 2004:81; 2005:157f).

As a constructive effort to bring vital needs and urgent issues to the fore so that they could be resolved in a healthy manner, the GM pioneered through specific platforms³ that brought together academics, scholars, statesmen, thinkers, and journalists from different worldviews in Turkey (JWF, 2004:7). “In regard to those attending and the arrangements,” this type of organization “had not before been seen in Turkey” (Önal, 1995).

In fact, the Journalist and Writers Foundation (JWF) works to consolidate and revitalize democratization. It leads the public space in starting negotiations on issues which have long caused tension and clashes. As a result of its efforts, the Abant Platforms, for instance, turned into an ideal forum for the objectives and dilemmas that Turkish society has longed to discuss and resolve. This yielded a capacity for co-existence with a common sense of citizenship and without the need for change or conflict. People from both the political left and right, from observant Muslims to secularists, from statesmen to citizens, and from members to leaders of non-Muslim communities in Turkey, came together for the first time

² <http://en.fgulen.com/a.page/press/interview/a1216p4.html>

³ The first platform was the Journalist and Writers Foundation.

and started questioning the past, perceiving a different reality, and became open to change and renewal (Barlas, 1995). Commenting on such gatherings, Öktem (1996) says, “Scholar-scientists, people of religion, members of the arts, and state officials, who until recently would never have imagined coming together, shook hands, embraced, and sat side by side.”

Such meetings, gatherings and platforms that have been initiated by the GM create possibilities for change without ever invalidating the legitimacy and authority of the system itself. As spaces for words and spaces for naming, as occasions where labels can be changed, they permit a new and different voice to be given than that which technical rationality denies or imposes on the world. This perspective stresses the role of institutions in defining what democracy will become. (JWF, 2004⁴)

Knowledge can contribute to reaching a new level of awareness, as developed by the GM, which then proves the movement’s ability to redefine the problem field. The GM is involved in producing and disseminating knowledge and making distinctions and contributing to the process of naming based on information. This makes all the difference in people’s lives, giving them a choice between either being manipulated through the absorption of meanings that have simply been imposed by external and invisible powers, or being able to autonomously produce and recognize meanings for individual and collective life. This constitutes a communicative act, making visible new powers and bringing out possibilities to challenge new systemic conflicts and new forms of social domination in a complex society (Melucci, 1999:75).

Gülen brings collective energy into focus and thereby addresses the deep-seated dilemmas, the critical choices on which a society needs to concentrate its attention. He addresses a wide spectrum of topics, ranging from individual, democracy, religion, culture, future, tradition, modernity, education, cooperation on current events, and many more (Eickelman, 1998:80). As Mardin (1996) comments, “With a distinguished view of such focal points as history, society, and the individual, his relating of faith to religion is rarely seen, even among social scientists.”

⁴ For more see, www.abantplatform.com and www.kadip.com

The moral and long-term dimensions of these issues continue to fuel societal debates in Turkey. Among such issues, debates, and ideologies, the GM exhibits a marked difference. Agai (2002:29) points out that the GM is not ideological, but rather seeks to educate people through flexible strategies. Rather than dealing with daily politics, the GM makes the latent and dormant power in the Turkish people visible and forces it to assume a shape in terms of educational, health, and intercultural and interfaith services and institutions. It thus gives explicit form to issues and calls for change in dealing with individuals and their needs, rather than political and governmental positions. It acts as the engine of transformation in the mentality and attitude of the people and as a byproduct exposes the contradictions and the silences that the dominant apparatuses of the political system seek to camouflage in such areas.

One of the excluded issues was opening out to other faith communities and interfaith dialogue. In this vein, Çandar (1998) interprets the Gülen-Pope Paul II meeting as a major “development” and the activities of the Gülen community as one “closely related to Turkey’s future.” As to the opposition to Gülen and his efforts, Çandar asserts:

At any rate, inside Turkey there is no “foundation of legitimacy” in the public conscience for opposition with this intent. If it continues along this path, Turkey will have chosen to be fully an isolationist–totalitarian regime. Those who follow such a path will be assumed to be guilty of having decided to destabilize Turkey or continue its ongoing instability. In this respect, the Gülen–Pope meeting is a very important security measure for Turkey’s democratization. Indirectly, it is an important contribution toward Turkey becoming a stable country.

Gülen throws light on hidden issues that are not accounted for by the rationality of the dominant apparatuses in Turkey, such as, the “analysis of our social structure, religious consciousness and the international community,” and Turkey’s right to have a say in international affairs. As Vergin (1996) stated, people ‘always wanted to know and hear such things,’ but they came from a preacher and Islamic scholar ‘in such a simple but profound and intense way,’ which must have been disturbing to some vested interests and power groups.

Information and the Media

Symbolic and informational resources are a new kind of power and more related to the production of nonmaterial resources and inequality. Inequality used to be considered a consequence of distribution and the control of economic resources, but now it is recognized that it arises from having, or lacking, a greater and specific control over the codes and symbolic resources that frame information. There are organizers of information which direct the flow and target specific consumers—a wider portion of social or administrative fields. In a society where information has become the crucial resource, power is also a component of the symbolic field that encompasses us all. Symbolic multipliers render the effects of communication unpredictable and disproportionate and deeply influence politics in critical areas of social life. (Melucci, 1999:225-228)

The media, in principle, should reflect reality faithfully and objectively. However, looking at the gap between the representation and the supposed reality, we see that this is not really true for the media in Turkey. During the days in which Turkey was counted among the most corrupt systems, “*the powerful Turkish media barons praised and protected politicians with whom they enjoyed close and profitable business relations. ... The corrupt quadrangle of businessmen, media, politicians, and bureaucrats, with its tentacles in Turkish political and economic life,*” played the greater part in the manipulation of the reality, misreporting news and transforming public and political life into a field of tension and conflicts (Aliriza, 2000:2-4; 2001:2). In essence, then, the problem concerns the greater or lesser visibility of codes, the pertinent decision-making processes, and a complex game of interaction.⁵

Gülen (2004:82) encourages and inspires the use of mass media to inform people about matters of individual and collective concern. When talking about the qualities of the new type of people who will embrace all humanity with altruistic services, Gülen says:

⁵ For more, see *Turkish Daily News* (2000), Hekimoglu (2000), Koru (2000a), Pope (2000).

To stay in touch and communicate with people's minds, hearts, and feelings these new men and women will use the mass media and try to establish a new power balance of justice, love, respect, and equality among people. They will make might subservient to right, and never discriminate on grounds of color or race.

Gülen communicates to a much broader cross-section of people through the media that was set up in the early 80s (*Fountain*, 2002:7). With his editorials and other writings, Gülen also makes contributions to several journals and magazines. He has written more than forty books, as well as hundreds of articles and has recorded thousands audio and video cassettes. Gülen has given countless speeches and interviews covering many pressing social, cultural, religious, national, and international issues. These all have been serialized in different dailies or compiled into books, and are always best-sellers in Turkey (Gülen, 2004:xiv). They are available in translation into all of the major world languages, both in print and electronically, via several websites⁶.

The GM have established a national and international television station, a news agency, a daily paper which has world language editions, and several magazines and publishing houses.⁷ They have established Feza Inc. which owns *Zaman* (an independent daily newspaper), *Aksiyon* (a leading weekly news magazine) and CHA (a major Turkish news agency). *Zaman* was established in 1986 and “*has been the first to publish a special U.S. edition in North America. Worthy and unsensational, Zaman is the only newspaper to print local Turkic language editions all over the Turkic world, some 15 editions in all*” (Pope:2005:372). It is the first Turkish daily newspaper available online, where it has been since 1995. *Zaman* also has special international editions for other foreign countries,⁸ predominantly printed in their own native languages. *Zaman* is acknowledged for its serious, fair and balanced reporting. It has won numerous national and international

⁶ For more, see <http://en.fgulen.com> and <http://www.pearls.org/>

⁷ <http://www.zaman.com> , <http://www.cihannews.com> , www.stv.com.tr

⁸ Those countries include Australia, Bulgaria, Romania, Macedonia, Germany, and the USA.

awards⁹, especially for its modern page layout and its contributions to intercultural understanding through its foreign editions. (Bonner, 2004:96-97)

These media all report on and disseminate educational and cultural activities as well as the worldview of the community. They are formally independent of one another; however, they are informed by diffused, multiple, educational, cultural, and professional networks of volunteers, the aim of which is to set a good example for one another, providing alternative perspectives and forums that thus can be emulated or improved by others (Murphy, 2005). They have also proven very effective during times when the values, services and institutions of the community were misrepresented, distorted, or blamed. They aspire to greater visibility in the decision-making processes which govern the media and define the political agenda. They act in this way so that the controversial issues and debates which divide society will not be “muffled and veiled behind the facade of formal neutrality and apparent self-referentiality.”¹⁰ In addition, they respect and encourage the public discourse that is created in everyday networks by citizens. (Agai, 2005; *Fountain*, 2002:3-9).

Turkey came to know the “*contradictions between media-military relations*” and the centers and people who decide on the language to be used – which information is to be organized and broadcast - during the most politically and economically turbulent years¹¹ that came before and after the soft-coup of February 28 (Birand, 2001). There were centers controlling language and related information technologies, as well as financial decision-making centers which moved enormous amounts of economic resources through the production and manipulation of information. This was the time when “*impropriety was maximized. Some of the people in power at the time, both in the civilian and military bureaucracies, took advantage of the situation*” (Ülsever, 2001). The power behind the

⁹ *Zaman*, 2005.

¹⁰ Melucci, 1999:227.

¹¹ Because of the illegal and fraudulent practices of the private banks that collapsed which were owned by media tycoons, the practice of public banks lending to themselves, the availability of billions of dollars for public banks that was controlled by the government, the embezzlement of billions of dollars overseas, the stock market plunged by one-quarter in two days.

media system imposed patterns of cognition and communication which worked far beyond the specific contents diffused by the news.¹²

A smear campaign against certain prominent journalists and intellectuals, who were without blame, was initiated to persuade public opinion that these individuals were providing support for a terrorist organization (*Turkish Daily News*, 2000; *Yeni Şafak*, 2000; Turkey Update, 2000). Among those targeted, Gülen was made the most prominent target to divert public attention onto a prominent and honest figure, thereby keeping the masses preoccupied while embezzlement, grafting, and the apportioning of State-owned Economic Enterprises (*KİTs*), lands, banks, resources, and wealth were all being carried out (Ünal, 2000).

A media group, grossly troubled by these improprieties, broadcast the Gülen discourse not simply on account of its 'intrinsic' news value, but rather according to a selection organized and operated by hidden priorities that had been established by interest groups and institutions. Not only did they convey Gülen's discourse in a severely doctored form, but they also exploited the mind, feelings and trust of the people and attempted to shape the mentality and attitudes of the bystanders and third parties that looked favorably on Gülen and the movement. It was really just a matter of the hidden operation of symbolic forms, patterning people's thoughts, emotions, and feelings.

As a result of the work and effort made by the media organs they had established, the adherents of Gülen proved themselves and the third parties as no longer being mere consumers of information; they could not be excluded from the discussion of the logic that organizes this flow of information, they were no longer there to only receive pre-fabricated news. They now had access to the power that shapes reality through the controlled ebb and flow of information. They set the formal pre-conditions for any discourse and practice and they rendered the difference and the unbalance of power visible without denying it.

¹² For more, see Cizre-Sakallioğlu, 2003: 309-332.

Social Mobility and Professionalism

Movements engage themselves with the tasks and issues pertaining to a complex society. This creates pressures on any system to incorporate some of the themes and practices raised by the movement's action, which leads to the modernization of institutions, whether they be political, cultural or economic (Melucci, 1999:114, 115). In order to evaluate the impact of the GM, its relationship between professionalization and social mobility should be taken into consideration.

This relationship emerges in three different forms in the GM. The first two forms are vocational—that is, in non-formalized, philanthropic, or altruistic service work.¹³ This yields, secondly, to a widespread, massive, but invisible cultural training in new skills and intellectualization. The third is virtually professional, including retraining processes aimed at better-employed actors in the market and institutions. Thus, the third helps promote the image of the movement through well-educated and qualified members within the larger social field. Such mobilization creates new enterprises, cooperatives, and agencies for personal development, in-service training, and job placement. This development is evident in sectors such as education, journalism, tv-production, radio broadcasting, cooperatives, the accommodation industry (the construction of houses, hostels and hotels), health-therapy, and banking-finance (Karaman & Aras, 2000:47).

In this respect, therefore, one of the effects of the movement has been the modernization of the system through the expansion of innovative occupational sectors, as well as the higher turnover of personnel in communications, education, and welfare services. Action directed towards cultural codes and the modes of symbolic construction in society lead to modernizing innovation, the equilibrium, and welfare, as long as a bureaucratic centralist approach does not prevail, exerting arbitrary controls, suspending the democratic process, and retaining its political values and the mechanism of a closed society (Kramer, 2000:221). Moreover, the extent of the services provided by the Gülen community inside

¹³ For a different discussion of the services given by the Gülen movement as 'ethics of vocation' – as inner (religious) and outer (worldly) qualifications and manifestations at work, see Agai (2002: 39-40).

and outside Turkey, the wide recognition and acknowledgement of their products in terms of quality, and their administrative and operational successes in extremely competitive environments may evoke in some people envy and hostility for political, ideological, or financial reasons.

Reflexivity or Symbolic Potential

Reflexivity or symbolic capacity¹⁴ is important in terms of the appropriation and representation of social action, production of meaning in action, autonomy of action, and the differentiation of the actor from others within a system. It is enhanced by the importance acquired in organizational and communications networks. Such networks yield to solidarity and build resistance against impositions from above or by a distant and impersonal power. (Melucci, 1999:108-109, 224, 381)

The reflexivity or symbolic potential of the GM is very high, for its communal identity is not based on primary memberships – gender, age, locality, or ethnicity (Özdalga, 2005:435). It is based on projects and services for the common and collective good, as Kebede *et al.* (2000:316) argue:

Collective identity is both the product and the cause of collective action ... [and] created in the midst of collective actions.

However, the ability of a collective actor to distinguish himself from others must be recognized by those ‘others.’ There must be at least a minimal degree of reciprocity in social recognition between the actors. When this minimal basis for recognition is lacking, there can only be pure repression (Melucci, 1999:73).

¹⁴ If individuals are able to define and recognize what and who they are, and what they are doing and wish to do, and what that action means and produces within the limits set at any given moment by the environment, this constitutes the reflexive capacity or symbolic potential of the action.

The GM also states that it belongs to the shared culture of society and its acceptance of the political and cultural diversity of Turkey (Agai, 2002:47). It does not deny the identity of others. Although, as Özdalga (2005:440) argues, “*the Gülen community neither socially nor economically differs markedly from the established elite,*” its opponents refuse to grant it that which they demand for themselves. Thus Gülen and his community find themselves in a conflict where they have to affirm their identity that has been denied them by their opponents (Özdalga, 2005:442).

The negative backlash of experiences of the '68 generation were ideological readings of reality, dogmatism, separatism, sectarianism, clashes, violence, and armed-conflict (Howard, 2001:141-147; Proyect, 2005) that still haunt and prevent the ideas of some intellectual-political elite from keeping abreast with the changing terms of Turkey. This statist, elitist, leftist, militant secularist group was unable to produce a political design which comprised instruments and models of transformation that is compatible with the historical, economic, and social context. And the effects of their actions at the systemic level did not instigate cultural innovation or institutional modernization. Later, some of those Marxists began to see and approach certain issues, and especially religion, differently. Şahin Alpay (1995a) said, “*our eyes opened a little more*” and “*society could not be understood without understanding religion,*” and “*religion is not the people's opiate, but it might be society's mortar.*” Refuting the secularists' “conspiracy theories” about Gülen, Alpay (1995b) states:

I perceive Hodjaefendi¹⁵ [Gülen] as a man of religion who separates religion from politics, opposes a culture of enmity that can polarize the nation, and contributes to our understanding of Islam with his tolerance. His efforts should be respected.

Against the indictment that Gülen aimed to turn Turkey into a religious state, Çevik (2000a) commented:

¹⁵ Respected teacher

All these are absurd. Everyone knows Gülen has been preaching tolerance and goodwill. He has always encouraged dialogue not only between the believers and non-believers, but also among religions. That is why he met the Pope and sowed the seeds of inter-religious dialogue. ... Is it wise to push around a person who is obviously not a terrorist? Are we doing a service to our country by discouraging his followers to push ahead with Gülen's project to raise a new generation of well-educated Turks who respect moral values as well?

Chris Morris (2000), of *The Guardian*, wrote about Mr. Ecevit, who resisted the suggestion that Gülen is a threat:

The Prime Minister, Bülent Ecevit, who has made his reputation as a staunch secularist, is one of Mr. Gülen's many fans. In particular, Mr. Ecevit has spoken of his admiration for the network of schools and colleges that [the] Gülen [community] has established across Turkey and ... [abroad].

At the World Economic Forum in Davos in 2000, Prime Minister Ecevit, as a matter of pride and prestige, expressed in his speech the importance of Gülen-inspired schools all over the world, and how these schools contribute to the cultures and well-being of Turkey and other countries.¹⁶

The segmentation of society leads to mobilization. Segmentation is the distance between and the size of barriers that separate social groupings. The higher the degree of segmentation, the denser the resulting network of associational and community affiliation; the more intense the collective participation in this network of relations, the more rapid and durable will be the mobilization of a movement (Oberschall 1973 in Melucci 1999). It is instructive to note how and by whom the segmentation in Turkish society is produced and retained and how the third parties react to this.

¹⁶ *Hürriyet* (2000); *Mainichi Shimbun* (2000); Bacık & Aras (2002); *The Muslim World* (2002: 387-418).

Before Turkey experienced its "witch hunt" period (Dorsey, 2000), or its "McCarthyism,"¹⁷ (Pope 1998), Mengi, a columnist from *Sabah*, wrote (1995):

The discussion begun by Fethullah Hodja can lead to a much sounder deterrence against religious fundamentalism than that which the state has produced. The door he opened can be a stage on the road to having the chance to live Islam within our own national identity. To open the people's way and secure peace and tolerance, religion must be protected by contemporary thinkers and institutions. If the developments of the past few days have taught us about this need, how fortunate we are...

Birand (2000) states in his article titled "Wasn't Gülen Supposed to Be a Saviour?":

This becomes increasingly harder to understand. Up until only a few years ago, Fethullah Gülen was portrayed as a major bulwark against religious extremism. Now, an 'elimination' operation has been launched. Something strange is going on. ... If Gülen was a "hazard," if his schools were providing the kind of education that conflicted with the secular system, then why was he treated as a "savior" at that time? If he was not a "hazard," why are efforts being made to "eliminate" him today? There is something strange about all this.

On behalf of all the puzzled and inquiring, Birand (2000b) poses the question, "If Gülen had committed a crime, why did the authorities wait until today?... To sum up, a highly dangerous process has begun."

The GM restructured and revived collective energies through the formation of new identities and new collective solidarities. They activated everyday communicative networks, and succeeded in raising new elites and intellectuals, whereas their opponents were questioned by some who were formerly among them. Yilmaz (2005:400) states that Gülen's discourse and practice have obtained the support of a number of well-known liberal intellectuals, such as renowned journalists Mehmet Altan, Ali Bayramoglu, Mehmet

¹⁷ What is referred to by both is the February 28 process.

Barlas, Etyen Mahcupyan, Mehmet Ali Birand, Gülay Göktürk, Neval Sevindi, Taha Akyol, Cüneyt Ülsever and Cengiz Çandar, who argue that the solution to Turkey's problems depends on reaching a consensus. Moreover, scholars, such as Ali Ünal, who were deemed to be 'radical Islamist,' have now reformed and fully support Gülen's thought and practice. Such influential Muslim scholars as Ali Bulaç and Fehmi Kuru, who are also known to western academic audiences, have also modified their discourses in line with Gülen and now express ideas that are different from their earlier thoughts.

Yagiz (1997) points out that Gülen aimed for and succeeded in bringing different segments of society together for the common good, establishing a ground against those who seek division and keep people opposed and tensed in their different camps:

Gülen wants to bring secularists and antiseccularists, who have been artificially separated on this issue, together on common ground. He says: "Secularism should not be an obstacle to religious devoutness, nor should devoutness constitute a danger to secularism."

Özdalga (2005:442) summarizes, "the Gülen community is a mediating role in the civilizing process," and "what the group or movement represents" may lead some to "counteract." "By attacking Fethullah Gülen from all such fronts, they must also be trying to frighten those intellectuals and politicians who give support to the activities that he has recommended and encouraged."¹⁸

Trans-National Projects and Recognition

Part of the reputation of the Gülen community comes from the collective energies channeled by Gülen towards the meaning produced by distant and impersonal apparatuses. Business, educational, and interfaith organizations that operate across the borders of

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<http://en.fgulen.com/a.page/press/review/fethullah.gulen.is.there.more.to.him.than.meets.the.ey/a1214.html>

economic, political, and cultural spheres adopt a common rationality based on knowledge, skills, and ethical values (*Fountain*, 2002:5). Such an educational mobilization addresses time, space, personal relations and individual selfhood, and the affective deep structure of individual behavior. Therefore, the rationality of the GM does not exhibit change, whether in Turkey or somewhere else. These successful trans-national and joint projects yield to significant recognition, cooperation, and acknowledgement from foreign entities and organizations (BBC, 2000).

Gülen is reputed in particular for encouraging people to serve Turkey and humanity through education, intercultural, and interfaith activities and institutions in order to lessen the gaps between people and to establish bridges for the common good and peace. These initiatives to cooperate with other faiths and cultures contribute to—and in return, bring about—acknowledgement of the non-violent and peace-making vision of the GM. Gülen (2004:259) frequently states as much in his articles, now compiled as a book, *Toward a Global Civilization of Love and Tolerance*:

We can, by coming together, stand up against those misguided souls and skeptics to act as breakers, barriers if you will, against those who wish to see the so-called clash of civilizations become a reality.

Most see Gülen as both an educationist and an educator, of not only the mind but also of the heart and spirit. In this vein, Gülen points out that Turkey's three greatest enemies are ignorance, poverty, and internal schisms. He asserts that knowledge, work-capital, and unification can struggle against these. As ignorance is the most serious problem, it can be defeated through education, which always has been the most important way of serving one's own community, country, and humanity. Poverty is eliminated through work and the possession of capital; internal schism and separatism are eradicated through unity, dialogue, and tolerance. Now that we live in a global village, he contends that the best way to serve humanity is to establish dialogue with other civilizations, to come together on some common ground, with mutual understanding and respect, and thus to work for long-awaited peace, the cooperation of diverse peoples, and the prevention of the predicted clash of civilizations. Gülen expresses, in a nutshell, that education is the most effective vehicle,

regardless of whether it is in Turkey or abroad, and whether or not people have systems that work or fail, as every problem in human life ultimately depends on human beings themselves. (Ünal & Williams, 2000:305-331)

Gülen forms the knowledge, shapes the discourse, offers the basic means, recommends projects, methods and values, and encourages all to peaceful cooperation through altruistically organized educational efforts (Sevindi, 1997; Agai, 2002:46). To ensure the sufficient understanding and tolerance that is necessary for securing the rights of and respect for others, Gülen urges the social elite, community leaders, industrialists, and businessmen to support quality education. This has resulted in several hundred educational institutions in Turkey and other countries. The students and graduates of many of these institutions, from Turkey to the Balkans, Europe, Africa, Central Asia, and the Far East, continue to take top honors in university placement tests and consistently finish top in the International Science Olympics, producing a number of world champions, especially in mathematics, physics, chemistry, and biology. (Ünal & Williams, 2000:338-349; Agai, 2002:42, 45-46)

Hundreds of people, from all walks of life, such as businessmen, journalists, writers, parliamentarians, ministers, presidents, and retired high-ranking generals, have visited such schools, and thereby witnessed the quality of education and the positive change in those students and the peoples affected.¹⁹ When some people have raised doubts about the consequences of those schools, Metin Bostancioglu, the National Education Minister said, ‘there is no problem in the Turkish [Gülen community’s] schools, but there are problems at home [the state schools in Turkey]’. Bostancioglu noted that ‘there is not a single school in the records of the National Education Ministry which is registered in the name of Fethullah Gülen’ and that ‘they are all registered in the name of foundations.’ He stressed that ‘the ministry carries out the necessary controls in the schools and the hostels’ in partner ‘with

¹⁹ For details of such people and their impressions, see Ünal & Williams (2000: 305-349); and also the schools were admired by both Turkish diplomatic representatives in the related countries and the local administrations, at <http://www.fethullahgulen.org/a.page/press/news/2004/a1866.html> ; <http://www.fethullahgulen.org/a.page/life/commentaries/c167.html> ; also in *Aksiyon* (1998) “Claims and Answers”, June 06. ; and at <http://en.fgulen.com/a.page/press/interview/a1216p5.html>

local authorities,' and that 'mathematics, physics, and English courses are good at the schools.' Minister Bostancioglu further asserts that the schools have no hidden agenda:

I believe that the children are educated well at these schools. The children are successful in the university entrance exams. The schools follow the curriculum. I do not know of any hidden targets of schools (Anadolu Agency 1999).

Gülen came with two suggestions against any concerns raised by a few. Pope (1998) narrates one:

If, in these schools, you can show me one word that is against democracy, the Republic, or Kemalism [Atatürkism] and its principles," he [Gülen] said in an interview to Milliyet newspaper, ... I'll say, 'close these evil nests.'

Concerning the schools, Özgürel (2000) states that "Ankara [the Turkish state] cannot find a concrete complaint or crime by which it can take over the schools." Gülen adds to that:

Actually some people are trying to oppose every manifestation of religion and show secularism and Atatürkism as atheism. Those who want to use Atatürkism for their own ends are exploiting the army's sensitivity on the subjects of secularism and Atatürkism and are trying to incite the army against the religious and patriotic people of this country.²⁰

The second quote is taken from a TV interview and a letter he sent to the secretary of Chief of Staff General Çevik Bir of Turkey (Özkök, 2004). He said, 'if the Turkish State and authorities would give guarantees on covering the expenses of continuing education and on keeping the standard of education at those schools at least as high as it is, the schools would be handed over to the State' (Yılmaz & Öztürk, 1997²¹). One of the journalists who visited

²⁰ <http://en.fgulen.com/a.page/press/interview/a1216p5.html>

²¹ also in Ünal & Williams, 2000: 226.

the schools in Russia and Central Asia was Cenk Koray. Koray (1998) discussed these in his column²²:

Instead of binding these schools to the Ministry of National Education, we should allow Gülen to administer the state schools in Turkey! A flower is not easily nurtured in a swamp. We are trying our best to pull up the flowers, make them fade, and destroy them! What a shame! A Russian official²³ succinctly stated the essence of this work: "There are two important events in Russian life: One of these is Yuri Gagarin's being sent into space before the Americans, and the other is the opening of these schools." If foreigners are thinking like this, what are we doing?

On 28 June 2000a, *The Turkish Daily News*,²⁴ on the domestic news page, reported an item entitled: 'Ambassadors Back Gülen Schools in Asia.' The article read:

In order to give a new impetus to Turkey's relations with Central Asian and Caucasian countries, the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs held advisory meetings in which Turkey's ambassadors to these countries participated, and then a report was prepared. The report said that Fethullah Gülen's schools in those countries had been playing a positive role in Turkey's relations with those governments.

Years later, what the Turkish ambassadors and the Ministry of Foreign affairs had stated was confirmed by the Kyrgyzstan Spirituality Foundation. The Foundation gave its "Intersociety Adaptation and Contribution to Peace" award to Fethullah Gülen for his contribution to international peace through his thoughts and activities in education. At the ceremony, the Kyrgyz Constitutional Court President, Mrs. Çolpon Bayekova, described Gülen as a person of science, peace and tolerance. Remarking on the international importance of Gülen's works, Bayekova said:

²² also in Ünal & Williams, 2000: 333-334.

²³ Who was in charge of Education in Moscow then.

²⁴ Also at <http://www.fethullahgulen.org/a.page/press/news/2000/a1062.html>

*We saw in Gülen an example that, if a person wants to, he can achieve as much on his own as any government does. We can establish peace and dialogue if we want. We, as Kyrghyz, work hard to fulfill Gülen's goals.*²⁵

The Romanian commission of UNESCO presented Fethullah Gülen with an award for his remarkable efforts in activities concerned with dialogue and tolerance and also for his efforts toward cooperation and peace between the nations of the world.²⁶

Cheryl Benard (2003:38) also confirms what has already been acknowledged by many:

Fethullah Gülen puts forward a version of Islamic modernity that is strongly influenced by Sufism and stresses diversity, tolerance, and nonviolence (Gülen, 1999). His writings have inspired a strong multinational following and have proven attractive to young people.

Altruistic Action and its Symbolic Challenge against the Sinecures of Vested Interests

Gülen's understanding of duty, which is to serve humanity particularly in the field of education, allows for no expectations of material or political gain. Sincerity and purity of intention should never be harmed or contaminated (Ünal & Williams, 2000:22). This understanding of service is geared primarily to "offering" (Melucci, 1999:359) in Turkey and abroad. Simply, it presents alternative models which state systems cannot replicate. Melucci argues that such action, such "offering," represents another breakdown in the rules of the game, for it is a symbolic challenge against the dominant cultural codes and the customary basis of strategic and instrumental logic in complex societies. He adds that the unilateral power of giving and thus generating and providing cultural models has constantly

²⁵ Zaman (2004)

²⁶ <http://www.zaman.com/?bl=columnists&alt=&trh=20051101&hn=25850>

resulted in a movement's predominance in societies, as the autonomous and gratuitous production of cultural models are not governed by cost-benefit calculations.

For over 50 years, Gülen has inspired generations “to achieve the right balance of social justice between the individual and community; to develop and advance in every individual and the whole nation feelings of love, respect, altruism, striving for the sake of others, sacrificing their own material and spiritual benefits, and aspirations for the sake of others” (Gülen, 2005:50). However, this has definitely offended some in Turkey. Tarcan (1998) expresses his difficulty in comprehending why some are disturbed by such altruistic actions and services and are so vehemently opposed to them. He disputes:

*In the name of country, ... Who can object to raising youth who use science and the technology it gave birth to for the good of humanity, scientists respectful of moral principles, administrators who serve people sincerely, and officials and managers who do not steal or abuse their position, but rather understand administration to mean serving the people?*²⁷

The February 28 Syndrome

Turkey has gone through a series of events, including the Susurluk scandal, the February 28 military coup, the İzmit earthquake, and deep economic and governmental/political crises over the last decades (Özel, 2003:80). During these times, the country has witnessed how “democracy is suspended or forced into the background every time its results are not acceptable to the powers that be” (Kramer, 2000:90). Kramer states that this produces a situation of discomfort among the people, for the system has then failed to provide individuals with the means and risk-reducing facilities by which they are able to overcome the consequences of far-reaching uncertainty (2000: xiii, 89).

²⁷ also available at <http://en.fgulen.com/a.page/life/commentaries/a826.html> ; in Ünal & Williams, 2000: 162-165).

On 28 February 1997, the National Security Council (NSC), seeing themselves as guardians of, among others things, in particular secularism released a public statement that “*destructive and separatist groups are seeking to weaken our democracy and legal system by blurring the distinction between the secular and the anti-secular. ...In Turkey, secularism is not only a form of government but a way of life and the guarantee of democracy and social peace ... the structural core of the state*”. In the end, the military’s “supervision” of the first democratically elected Islamist government, headed by Erbakan, resulted in its forced resignation in June 1997. Following this, the pressure on the Muslim communities increased, with some secular leaders hoping for a “settling of accounts” with political Islam.²⁸

In what the commander of the navy admitted was a *postmodern coup*,²⁹ the military commanders forced the politicians either to implement the proposed measures or to fashion an alternative government that would do so. Erbakan agreed to an 18-point plan to reduce the influence of Islam in Turkey, that is, to curb Islamic-minded political, social, cultural, and economic groups. The ban on certain faith communities and religious institutions and organizations would be enforced, the “reactionary” personnel from the governmental positions and state posts would be purged, and the spread of State İmam-Hatip schools would be stopped, with tighter restrictions being maintained on “politically symbolic garments like women’s head scarves.” Many companies were pronounced “backward” and state institutions and people were warned not to buy anything from those companies. Aras & Bacik (2000:51) point out that since the military coup of 1980, nothing has been as divisive in Turkish political life as the NSC decisions of February 28, because the army endorsed its supremacy over political life. Whether, however, it is called a *soft* or *post-modern* coup, the Turkish political scene has become even more confused and unpredictable.³⁰

²⁸ Aliriza & Baran, 1977; Howard, 178-179; Dorsey, 1997; Howe, 2000:139-144.

²⁹ Birand, 2001.

³⁰ *Turkish Daily News*, 1999; Cevik, 2000; Aliriza & Baran 1977; Dorsey, 1977; *New Europe*, 1997; Karaman & Aras, 2000: 58

The problem of uncertainty went somewhat further (Pope, 2005:26) as military-imposed regulations further suspended rules, values, and goals, and thereby affected the capacity of individuals, groups, and collectivities to respond with certitude to the question of identity: who we were before, and who we are now (Melucci, 1999:374). ‘*No major element of Turkish politics at present can be understood without reference to the February 28 process*’ (Cizre-Sakallioglu, 2003:310). Cizre-Sakallioglu discusses that the February 28 process

indicates not only the far-reaching implications of the NSC decisions, but also the suspension of normal politics until the secular correction was completed. This process has profoundly altered the formulation of public policy and the relationship between state and society.

The suspension of rules and values becomes even more evident if we examine the emotional side of the situation. The experience of some individuals involved with, or in favor of, the faith communities in Turkey was ambivalent because of the magnitude of the shock produced by the rapidity and unpredictability of the event. It was accompanied by fear and anxiety over what was lost and the new situation that had been created. Frantz of *The New York Times* (2005) points out that the war of attrition during the February 28 coup “*sent a chill through his [Gülen’s] circle of admirers and raised anxieties among liberals who are not associated with his movement.*” However, the aftermath of the February 28 coup also suggested hope or a will for renewal, once people had recovered from the immediate shock. It was as if they had suffered the blow of bereavement and now had to reconstruct their world. (Birand, 2001; Çevik, 2000b)

Simultaneously, destructuring is accompanied by restructuring and the revival of collective energies through the formation of new identities and of new collective solidarities which, very frequently, are created and made manifest after the event. Instead of retreating into passivity, a number of conditions can be applied to the capacity of the GM to respond to such a situation positively (Melucci, 1999:376-377). There are three such conditions:

- I. The first refers to the quality of the preexistent relations, institutional bonds, and representation channels, and also to forms of authority and the amount of

reliability and legitimacy that had previously been produced and enjoyed by Gülen and his readers. Gülen, as an authority who has already demonstrated his credibility when he has foreseen, prearranged, and proven himself able to control emergencies in the past, remains credible even when everything else collapses.

- II. The second concerns ‘the existence of informal networks, of everyday solidarity circles’; ‘the density and vigor of the networks of belonging, and the associative experiences that individuals have accumulated.’ The mobilization resources present were directed towards new goals because they were already in place; if they had not existed, the situation could not have created them. The situation simply helped to redirect and reshape them. Thus, informal networks and resources and ‘all the heritage present’ in the Gülen community determined the type of response to the crisis, as noted especially following the February 28 coup.
- III. The third is ‘the presence of space to listen—the presence of civic listening spaces.’ The group or the authorities that intervene should be able to listen at various levels. Listening really means ‘paying attention to what people need and learning from what people have begun to do.’ This was exactly what was done by the GM, but not by the masterminds of the February 28 injustices.

Kenes (2003) states that Gülen was attacked by some who were marginal in the establishment and by their extensions in the media and other sectors of the civilian sphere. On the other hand, as Gülerce (2004) stated, the support did not diminish for Gülen and his community within Turkish society after this war of attrition. Gülerce writes:

Even during periods when Gülen was subjected to planned attacks carried out by certain circles, it was observed that he had 85 percent of public support.³¹

³¹ The cable news company ntv-MSNBC conducted a survey (10,000 people) and showed that “96 percent of the public do not consider Gülen to be a threat to the country.” Ajan.net also conducted a survey (36, 367 people) and found that “91 percent of the public accept Gülen as a moderate Islamic scholar and do not consider him a threat or the leader of a terrorist-subversive organization.”; also in Onur, 2000.

The Redefinition of Democracy

Contemporary movements concern themselves more with “a redefinition of what democracy is, can be, and ought to be.” Individuals and groups nowadays wish to construct their identities “instead of remaining simply recipients of them assigned from the outside.” Political institutions in democracy open up, but simultaneously restrict, a field of participation compatible with the system. Yet, they also allow social demands to transform into a collective opportunity to exercise rights and to voice opposition. (Melucci, 1996:203; 215)

The distinction and the tension between institutional channels and movements ... are indispensable for democracy in complex systems. An open society is possible where political actors assume a non-totalizing role as mediators of demands.
(Melucci, 1999:215-216)

With respect to the criticism of his meetings with political leaders and government members, Gülen’s response is nothing other than what participatory or pluralist democracy necessitates:

In a democracy, a system with a fully civil character, popular participation in the administration is encouraged to the extreme, as summed up in the saying that ‘the nation owns unrestricted and unconditional sovereignty.’³² I have never even thought of going into the street to demonstrate and openly criticize the system, although democracy permits this when necessary. In fact, as such behavior could lead to anarchy I always approach it with caution. For this reason, not only as a right but as a responsible citizen, citizens meeting with political and state leaders, or state leaders and politicians meeting with people from every social segment should be appreciated and encouraged.³³

³² “To the nation belongs unrestricted and unconditional sovereignty,” is an epitaph of Atatürk, the founder of the Turkish Republic, which is displayed in the Grand National Assembly Hall.

³³ Ünal & Williams, 2000: 174-175.

Gülen also draws attention to the fact that his meetings “operate fully within the legal framework of Turkish Republic.”³⁴ In an interview, Gülen states, “If we are to proceed to an even more perfect democracy that can be achieved again through democratic processes” (Akinci, 1997).³⁵

Gülen says, “The majority of our media support such initiatives, regardless of their origin. Almost all state and political leaders and intellectuals have expressed their approval and appreciation.” Yet, how are we then to understand the logic of those who oppose such efforts?³⁶

The Turkish political system is subjected to various degrees of influence within the system and via the constraints imposed by a system of dominance anchored in social relationships. Although the confines determining the issues that can be submitted to the decision-making process are structurally set³⁷ in Turkey (Özgürel, 2000), control over the rules and mechanisms of decision-making are assumed to be the privilege of those representing the dominant interests.

The state elite, as Kramer states, “...was reluctant to give up its tutelage of the masses,” though they have “had hardly any relations with the masses” (2000:1, 8). Therefore, they wish to allege that any attempt to shift power relationships within the political system or to acquire influence over decisions is either a threat, a matter of crisis for the regime, or a national security issue.

Özdalga (2003:61) confirms that “power interests also underlie the deeply-rooted suspicion of the Gülen community.”

³⁴ *Akşam*, 1995; <http://en.fgulen.com/a.page/life/relations/a767.html> ; Ünal & Williams, 2000: 175-176.

³⁵ also at <http://en.fgulen.com/a.page/press/interview/a1203.html>

³⁶ <http://en.fgulen.com/a.page/life/relations/a767p3.html>

³⁷ The founding principles of the Turkish Republic are written within those parts of the Constitution that “cannot be changed.” Özgürel states, “We have seen that the principles of law, democracy, and social justice can be neglected, but the most sensitive principles, those of the Republic, secularism, and national security, are bound up tight”; <http://en.fgulen.com/a.page/press/columns/2000/a700.html>

Gülen states that he has 'absolutely no political aspirations or expectations,' and that he was 'never involved in any political effort or activity. ... But I see myself as a genuine member of this nation, as one of the threads in the lace of this culture. So as long as I live, if I have an opinion about an issue that is related to it, I won't hesitate to express this.'

Turkish society correctly witnessed non-representative institutional arrangements in the Susurluk scandal³⁸ and the military memos related to the events of February 28, 2001 (Hale, 1999; Jung, 1999). *Yeni Şafak* columnist and Member of Parliament Nazli Ilicak published a memo which had been issued from the General Staff's Intelligence Bureau. This memo, dated April 1998 and entitled "Special Action Plan," revealed ordering "a smear campaign" to silence oppositional voices among intellectuals, journalists, politicians, and civil society members." According to the memo, dated just after the February 28 process, Cengiz Çandar, Mehmet Ali Birand, and the former Human Rights Association Chairman, Akin Birdal, were among targets of the campaign. Soon after the apprehension of Şemdin Sakik, the second man in the armed separatist Kurdish terrorist organization, the PKK, Sakik allegedly "confessed" that these individuals had financial and organizational links to the PKK separatist terrorist organization. It was evident that most of the public would buy into these headlines. An even graver issue, an assassination on Birdal followed, leaving him heavily injured. Soon afterwards, it became clear that Sakik's statement was not genuine. The memo points to the responsible individuals in the Chief of Staff's office: the Former Deputy Chief of the General Staff, General Çevik Bir and the Chief of the General Staff, General Secretary Erol Özkasnak. Hekimoglu (2000) interviewed Çandar to further reveal the unknown reasons and details of such memos. Hekimoglu comments:

The incident was telling about the journalism ethic and had a financial aspect as well, because it coincided with the investigation of the Sabah management for their

³⁸ For more news and articles in the Turkish media and press on Susurluk, see the Turkish Press Scanner dated 9 and 18 November, 1996, in *Turkish Daily News*; Berberoglu, Enis (1996) 'Susurluk's Missing Link Talks,' *Radical*, April 29 also available in *Turkish Daily News* (1996) 'Susurluk's Missing Link Talks,' April 30, Turkish Press Scanner.

shares in the bailed-out Etibank. Sabah columnist Cengiz Çandar says, "My newspaper sold me out."³⁹

Against the accusations that *some* from the state used Ekşi and gave him instructions to write his column accordingly, the daily *Hürriyet's* Oktay Ekşi (2000), in his article entitled 'Character Assassination,' dated November 24, confesses:

In the Sakik incident, the state [⁴⁰] has deceived the members of the press, including me. I am publicly condemning those who have deceived the press and caused me to write things against fellow journalists (such as Birand and Çandar, who were implicated as being on the payroll of the outlawed PKK in the so-called 'statement' of the PKK's number-two man, Sakik, which was leaked to the press.) (Note: Later, Sakik denied having said any such thing.)

The General Staff Secretary *confirmed* the authenticity of the memorandum. Some analysts interpreted the army's willingness to implicitly confirm its veracity as a sign that the current commanders did not approve of their predecessors' actions. Others simply hoped this controversy would be an opportunity to lay the past to rest: "*The army has admitted the facts,*" said Birand.⁴¹

The Turkish Journalists' Association (TGC) issued a press release on August 10 stating:

*It has been observed that the media is involved in a number of conflicts of interest and is furthermore under the influence of certain power centers, and this is reflected in media policies. In light of this, it is not possible to speak of editorial independence.*⁴²

³⁹ For details, see Hekimoglu, 2000; Koru, 2000a; Pope, 2000; <http://www.ntvmsnbc.com/news/41910.asp> .

⁴⁰ In fact, not the State, but a few generals and their team at the Chief of Staff.

⁴¹ Pope, 2000.

⁴² *Turkish Daily News*, 2000b.

During this period, some marginal but similarly-minded people – i.e. special interest groups, ideologically motivated individuals, staunch militant secularists (who were anti-Islam), and a few people abusing their judicial authority or military ranks – jointly fabricated news and threats. They selected certain columnists in the press and media to ensure that information was spread widely among the public. They aimed to influence public opinion and decrease popular confidence in certain journalists, members of parliament, academics, intellectuals, and civil society members.

After that, Gülen became the highest profile target. Behind the façade of accusations against him about seeking to overthrow the regime, creating national security issues, and presenting threats of reactionary fundamentalism, those orchestrating the February 28 coup tried to conceal their dishonest dealings, and their grafting and plundering of state wealth and resources. Koru (2000a) questioned the events: *“We wonder which of the incidents of the recent past were real and which were “fabricated.”*⁴³ The social-democrat leader Deniz Baykal said it was *“not acceptable for non-political institutions to get involved in the political debate. Institutions should only be concerned with their own field.”*⁴⁴

The traditional leadership of Turkey is based on its strict nationalist, secularist, and bureaucratic-authoritarian understanding. Leadership groups first try to maintain their interests and then secure national interests. In many cases, the interests of the leadership group are proposed as national interests (Ataman, 2002:122, 150). Hale (1999) argues:

Based on a cartel of interest and legitimized with the Kemalist ideology, this elite controls the resources of the modern sectors of Turkish society. However, whereas the social structural background of this elite is modern, their behavior is characterized by an authoritarian and elitist habitus...

Eickelman (2004) points out that “the militant secularism of some governing elites—the Turkish officer corps, for example— has been associated until recently with authoritarianism and intolerance more than with “enlightenment” values.” As a response to

⁴³ also *Turkish Daily News*, 2000c.

⁴⁴ Pope, 2000.

such intolerable reactions, which imply that he is after political gains or seeking a new political formation—though that is, in any event, quite legal and permitted by Turkish law and by the constitution—Gülen responds:

*I consider such speculation as a great insult for me. My path consists of searching for God. It is wrong to portray a man who found something in his life according to his own measures as one who is still looking for something. Those who found God have found everything. All other yearnings are futile in life. I always had meetings with political figures but my attention has never wavered from the ultimate goal of my life, i.e. searching for God.*⁴⁵

The representation of interests within the Turkish political system is not realized through transparent replication. Instead, dominant social relationships set boundaries and determine both the potential and the limits of action within the system. The coercive character of some political decisions is not simply a functional necessity founded on consensus, but also the way by which dominant social relations manifest themselves within the political system. Alan Makovsky (2000) sees the insistence for a purge of all alleged Islamist officials in governance, during which Gülen was also implicated, as “*the regime's effort to implement a draconian anti-Islamist programme without clear public support.*”

This was exactly the case during the accusation and trial of Gülen. That was the reason the judge in the case rejected a request by some other groups to be civil parties to the trial. Then, the attitude of certain military officers, the chief prosecutor, and some militant pro-secular associations caused them to attempt to directly intervene in the internal functioning of the political and judicial system, simply because a new group within the system began to strain the limits of their habitual functioning and of their dominant social relationships. Whether accessing the apparatus of the state and the media system, or whether influencing

⁴⁵ Akinci, 1997; also at <http://en.fgulen.com/a.page/press/interview/a1203p4.html>; for a different answer to a similar question, see also <http://en.fgulen.com/a.page/life/relations/a767p5.html>

legislative decision-making, those who represent the dominant interests do not wish to lose the structural advantages they enjoy within the political game.⁴⁶

In fact, Turkey's number one problem is then “the economic crisis, not Islamic fundamentalism.” Expressing his views on issues that are on the country's agenda, Kutan⁴⁷ said:

Turkey's number one problem is the economic crisis and the difficulties the people are having in making ends meet. The agenda of the people and that of Ankara are incompatible. (BBC, 2000c)

Despite such similar explanations in 2000, Turkey continues to discuss and be under the influence of the massive corruption that was maintained and protected during the February 28 process. Considering corruption as “also a vital issue to be taken up by the National Security Council (MGK),” and asking the generals and “those who are concerned about the preservation of the Republic and the system” to “realize that under the current corrupt and deficient system everything could fall apart,” Çevik (2002), in an editorial titled ‘Corruption is Also a Top Threat,’ argues:

The sensitivity and determination shown in the fight against religious radicalism and separatism should also be displayed against corruption, which we feel is the number one menace. Corruption is at the root of many of the ills in Turkey. ... We feel the military should also take up this menace and get to the bottom of the corruption and irregularities which have eaten into our state system.

The system in Turkey filters, selects, and represses some demands on account of the perceived threat they pose as being potentially undermining to the very structure of the society. The requisite stigmata are readily at hand. It handles and reduces all kinds of opposition to a ‘crisis of regime.’ One way for political actors to seek a reduction in the risks involved in a decision is to secure for themselves a preventive consensus through the

⁴⁶ *Turkish Daily News* 2000; ntv-MSMBC 2000; BBC 2000a; BBC 2000b.

⁴⁷ the Virtue Party leader

use of propaganda and ideological manipulation, which is usually considered to be *Kemalism*. Hale (1999) argues:

Turkey has so far not been able to shake off the inherited notion and institution of the authoritarian state and the transmitted undemocratic and non-egalitarian habitus of its military-bureaucratic elite. Around this institutionalized core of the rule of the military-bureaucratic reformers, a new modern elite has emerged in the Turkish Republic. Based on a cartel of interest and legitimized with the Kemalist ideology, this elite controls the resources of the modern sectors of Turkish society.

The decisions by the political system affect the rest of the social structure. In a closed political system, transparency is impossible and impropriety is maximized. Ülsever (2001) states that, “*some of the people in power at the time, both in the civilian and military bureaucracies, took advantage of the situation.*” He questions those who claimed to love Turkey more than anyone else and yet held the most important positions during the era of the February 28 process. He states that those people “*did nothing at all about improprieties during their reign.*”

The enemies of ‘people’s money’ should surely have been captured when these lovers of the country held the most prominent positions. Instead they imposed a closed system where they had more rights than others ‘to protect the country’ and ‘intervene’ when the democratic system made mistakes. However, ‘the economics of impropriety’ were not solved, or even touched then!

Melucci argues (1999:240-242) that “the execution of a decision requires the mobilization of both the administrative apparatus of the state and a sufficient quota of political consensus.” The variable relationship between these two components settles the degree of legitimization attached to the decisions. Therefore, the influence or efficacy of a decision must be evaluated as part of the extant relationship between the forces and interests in a given society. Turkey witnessed such power-wielding efforts and disagreements when President A. Necdet Sezer twice refused to approve a decree proposed by the military

which would have allowed for the dismissal of thousands of public employees ‘suspected’ of Islamist or separatist leanings. (BBC, 2000)

The participation of the GM in terms of their projects within Turkish social and cultural life does not expand beyond the limits of institutional confines. Their services and organizations do not break the rules of the political game. Quite the contrary, as the BBC’s regional analyst, O’Toole (2000) discussed:

Gülen has even been feted by Turkey's secular establishment. ...The message he preaches is one of tolerance, promoting a private, non-politicized form of Islam, which can peacefully coexist with Turkey's strongly secular state.

Nonetheless, a repressive intervention was launched to reestablish the limits of the system. Morris (2000) argues that, “the [Gülen] case could split Turkish society. Some will regard the allegations as the fruits of secularist paranoia, while others will insist the threat is real and immediate.” In the court case, the Chief State Security Prosecutor persistently attempted, but failed each time, to attain an arrest warrant for Gülen. The courts rejected the prosecutor’s bids on a lack of substantial evidence, which indicates that the state apparatus is never merely a docile, monolithic instrument in the hands of the dominant groups; its operation also reflects the degree of autonomy of the political system.

The attempt to discredit Gülen and his services, or to turn public resentment against the GM, thus legitimizing repression, is one of the essential components of the framing activity conducted by interest groups after 1997. Control over the flow of information and the media guaranteed a structural advantage for the powers that be, as the game was never entirely open and positions were not of parity. However, these interest groups failed to contend successfully for the public consensus, and the overwhelming majority of journalists, politicians and civil society leaders remained unconvinced by the arguments against Gülen, though some were compelled to silence. Çevik (1999) comments:

There are forces within the state which are trying to use Gülen for their own power struggle. Those who started the crusade against Erbakan now are testing their

strength against Gülen, who is not only a moderate preacher, but also a man who has won friends in high places. They want to show everyone that they can move mountains and, thus, that they call the cards in Turkey. Let us hope all this blows over with minimum damage to Turkey after the August reshuffling⁴⁸ period ends.

Symbolic Challenge and the Structures of Domination

Collective actions announce to the society that other definitions, alternatives, and dimensions of human experience are possible. They call the society to its responsibility, to a social construction, making visible the social power exerted over time. Such an appeal poses symbolic challenges to the structures of domination in a society, as it affirms freedom, equality, and difference.

Collective action also puts pressure on the political market. Pressure is not necessarily always demand-oriented or antagonistic. In a manner most marked in the GM, new social rationality and action concern moral and cultural codes, not necessarily confrontation and conflict with the political system. It allows a reappropriation of the multiformity of roles in providing services for the community. This social centrality of actor, the autonomous role in defining personal needs, the constant mediatory relationship between welfare, health, education, and the individual, family, and community, gives everyday experience a function. This situates action along the continuum ranging from difference to innovation, to the creation of new arenas for action and culture which dominant groups and interests may neglect or may see as explicitly antagonistic in character. The GM maintains a degree of distinction from the *dominant* cultural codes through the constitution and operation of organizational forms which prefigure the goals it pursues and through its activity visibly signals the societal problems it addresses. Hence some assume its character as a challenge, and the more prominent such prefiguration, the greater the challenge.

⁴⁸ The August reshuffling period is the time when military officers are promoted or retirement decisions are taken. Before and during this time, national security threats, faith-based movements, and communities are always made into headline cases by some, interestingly enough, likely-to-be-retired generals.

In democracy, people are encouraged to participate in order to have a voice (Melucci, 1999:183). If and when someone other than one of the established people within the Turkish system does achieve something, the pervasive tendency of the system is to start calling for silence, retreat, and isolation, or to solicit participation into its fold, rather than supporting communication, inclusion, and socialization. The acceptance of one's assigned place in society serves as an effective and important processor of information. When Gülen has met with presidents, premiers, ministers, or other authorities, local or foreign, the reaction of dominant interests has been vocal and contentious. To them, Gülen is merely a preacher who must lead prayers, but do nothing more. They question why he finds himself dealing with cultural and social issues, and why he is accepted as a partner in dialogue by world leaders, such as the Pope. (Zelyut, 1998)⁴⁹

The institutionalization of social understanding, a symbolic function in indicating the cultural potential embedded in an issue or in a specific social field, opens up a new arena for innovation and change. The institutionalization of societal dynamics in a complex society is more appropriate than the simple interrogation as to whether or not the GM is politically effective. Bayramoglu (1995) sees the institutionalization of the GM as a success and points out that people in the GM "have gained new life for their activities via traditional foundations, which help legitimize them and represent an important method of linking society's past and culture. It is also an important indication of the culture's requests for unity and modernity."⁵⁰

A common concern today is to find the ways in which we can coexist and develop common goals while respecting differences. The likely ways to do so are not set once and for all, but have to be agreed upon over and over again in a continual negotiation process. The ongoing projects, the ever-increasing number of educational institutions, the cultural and dialogue centers, and the non-profit, non-governmental organizations are important civic initiatives forming part of this continual negotiation by the GM. The common ground is constructed through the awareness that it is impossible to reach one's goals without some support from

⁴⁹ Also in Ünal & Williams, 2000:292-293.

⁵⁰ Ünal & Williams, 2000: 160-161; also at

<http://en.fgulen.com/a.page/life/commentaries/c167.html>

others, without alliances or agreements. The GM sees a radical form of ‘identity politics’ to be dangerous for society because of its intolerant and self-defeating fundamentalism. And polls carried out by independent institutions and organizations indicate that the overwhelming majority of the Turkish public and other non-Turkish societies approve of the works and deeds of Gülen and his community.⁵¹

Success of the Movement

Success of the GM has transformed the movement into a pressure group. That is why it is perceived as a threat to the dominating interests of the particularly privileged part of Turkish society. There are several analytical criteria to measure the success of the GM. However, this requires a more extensive study beyond the scope and limit of the current paper. Yet, it can succinctly be said that the GM proves itself successful in the sight of communities in Turkey and abroad by mobilizing inactive, dormant, but innovative energies present in Turkish and other societies; by absorbing conflicting pressures and easing tension within fragmented communities; by subduing to the common sense the potential for coercive means and ends to induce changes in political systems; by never showing any inclination whatsoever towards violence, despite provocations and ill-treatment; by involving diverse people within a very short time over a large, extended, geography, to achieve joint projects; by recognizing the outcomes of its actions and securing positive recognition from others; by comparing and perceiving the consistency and continuity of the movement over time and across borders; by always progressing and modernizing its culture and organization; by raising or selecting new elites for the services provided; by employing a sound rationality through the apparent neutrality of technical expertise in order to be able to appeal to all; by socializing and transmitting values; by having a large number of organizations operating across borders in economic, political, and cultural spheres; by circulating and diffusing ideas, information, new patterns of action, and

⁵¹ Gülerce, 2004; For more, see <http://en.fgulen.com/a.page/life/education/a780p1.html> and <http://en.fgulen.com/a.page/life/commentaries/c167.html> , as all retrieved on Oct 01, 2005 08:17:46 PM.

cultures; by transforming collective action and services into institutionalization; by seeing its own limitations and being reflective; and, last but not least, by being a progenitor movement.

If the actions of the GM are measured against the interests and objectives of a certain sector of society, as Eickelman (2004) stated, who are “militant secularis[ts] of some governing elites ... [who have] been associated until recently with authoritarianism and intolerance more than with “enlightenment” values,” then it proves itself successful. What the GM provides and accomplishes, as Eickelman (1998) claims, comes up against strong vested interests, as well as the fiefdoms and sinecures of some in the Turkish system:

Civility and tolerance will not prevail without struggle. The ideals of civil society, democracy, and open debate over basic values-ideals that are explicit in the works of ... Turkey's Fethullah Gülen ... are up against strong vested interests. These ideals threaten the sinecures of many preachers, specialists in religious law, educators, and clerics. Not surprisingly, some efforts at reform have been met with threats of violence.

Conclusion

The campaign in 1999 against Gülen demonstrates the way in which civic movements run into conflict with the interest groups within the state. Gülen and his community do not have any aspirations to evolve into a political party or seek political power. On the contrary, as Karaman & Aras (2000:56) discuss, Gülen represents the continuation of a long Sufi tradition of seeking to address the spiritual needs of the people, to educate the masses, and to provide some stability in times of turmoil. And, like many previous Sufi figures (including Jalal ad-Din Rumi), he has been wrongly accused of seeking political power.

The Turkish press reported that, “Gülen should be rewarded rather than punished. His services should be applauded and he should be awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.”⁵² The cable news company Ntv-MSNBC conducted a survey (10, 000 people) and showed that “96 percent of the public do not consider Gülen to be a threat to the country.” Ajan.net also conducted a survey (36, 367 people) and found that “91 percent of the public accept Gülen as a moderate Islamic scholar and do not consider him a threat or the leader of a terrorist-subversive organization.”⁵³ The Turkish media then asked, “Is this not a little exaggerated?” Also, the BBC World Service, *Reporting Religion*, reflected some of the state sector’s confusion about Gülen and his community with the headline, “Turkey Prosecutes an Islamic Leader Widely Seen as a Moderate.” It concluded with, “Is he a wolf in sheep’s clothing, or is this secularism gone mad?”

After having prosecuted him for three years, on March, 10, 2003, Ankara State Security Court No. 2 postponed taking a final resolution on the Gülen case. The court ruled that in the event that Gülen were to be involved in similar or graver acts requiring a jail sentence within the next five years, the case would continue; and if he were not to be, then the case should be revoked. Attorneys for Fethullah Gülen objected to the resolution, demanding a continuation of the case in solicitation of acquittal. But Ankara State Security Court No. 1 stated that its resolution was final. Essentially he has been cleared, yet only as long as he does not commit any further “crimes,” as perceived by the state. As yet, he has not, of course, but the chief prosecutor has opted to leave the case open for the next five years. Thus, if Gülen has not died by then, the case against him will finally collapse.⁵⁴

⁵² Fehmi Kuru, in several articles in the daily *Zaman*, reiterated that Fethullah Gülen should indeed be nominated and awarded a Nobel Peace Prize for the services he has rendered towards education in Turkey and abroad, and for the intercultural and interfaith activities he has initiated and maintained in and outside Turkey. The articles are: ‘The Pride of Turkey’ 09/09/1997; ‘Nation Builds and Protects’, 25/12/1997; ‘Not a Syndrome but a Story for a Nobel Prize’, 16/03/1998a; ‘When the Clouds Dispersed’ 31/03/1998; also Hüseyin Gülerce (2003) in the Preface to *Native and Peculiar: A Story for a Nobel Prize* by Fehmi Kuru, Foundations of Journalists and Writers, Istanbul. p.8.

⁵³ Kaya, Onur (2000) ‘Gülen ılımlı din adamı’ (trans. ‘Gülen is a Moderate-Tolerant Islamic Scholar’), *Zaman* Sep.15.

⁵⁴ *Turkish Daily News*, 2003; <http://en.fgulen.com/a.page/press/news/2003/a1226.html>

Yet despite all odds, the GM acts and operates fully in a form and field which is institutionalized and legal within the Turkish system and abroad. The GM's activities do not aim to maximize the advantages of the actor in political decisions. However their worldview or services might empirically affect the political system, they do not threaten to disregard or infringe on the system of rules nor extend beyond its institutional boundaries. The services given by the community are not a contest among adversaries for the distribution of control over the allocation of social production and the creation of imbalances of power among social positions. Thus, all the efforts of the GM need to be analyzed as *collective social altruism*, using analytical categories rather than political ones. Özdalga (2000; 2003:62) attempts to explain this using Weber's notion of "worldly asceticism":

Rather than advancing political ambitions, his [Gülen's] objective is to foster an ethic that comes very close to what Max Weber described as 'worldly asceticism,' an activist pietism with a tendency toward the rationalization of social relationships.

Those who fear that they will lose their direct control over power and their collective interest within the system direct their aggressiveness at the GM in order to at least partially repair this sense of loss and to preserve the positiveness of their action in the eyes of the general public. The groups in decline within the political system, and which have a common interest in keeping those gates closed as far as possible, naturally react to protect their established position within that system by resisting the intended outcome, counter-mobilizing themselves against the GM and, at times, imposing selective and exclusionary restrictions on the criteria for such understandings and services wherever it is possible to do so.

Through educational initiatives, new media organs and networks, opposition to violent and coercive means and methods, intercultural and interfaith dialogue, and cooperation on civilizing projects and services the GM has succeeded in revealing the social and political nature of the definitions imposed by the dominant interest groups and their apparatuses, and

has, to-date, achieved some significant results in changing public attitudes towards these experiences.

Gülen and his movement started to act towards the neglected side of human experience and meaning. Their message is embedded in their actions. They do not ask for goods, advantages or political positions. Their actions present society with new meaning, cultural gifts, and another face of reality. When they act, something has already been said by this very action. If the message is incorporated into the social arena, the debates may commence. If the issues are taken up by politically relevant agents they may be translated into political agendas for the public. But, regardless of what actually happens, the GM has proven itself capable of bringing about a change in the way people's experiences are perceived and named. Thus, it becomes the bearer of the hidden potential for change, and it announces new possibilities to the rest of society. The mobilization of people for education, transnational educational and cultural projects, and international interfaith dialogue efforts are good example of this.

In conclusion, the collective mobilization of the GM occurs to this day, continuing because the actor has succeeded in realizing—and through the course of action continues to realize—a certain integration between many contrasting requirements. Evidently, tensions may arise among ends, means, and relationships with the environment. However, in all circumstances, Gülen and his readers act meaningfully to reduce 'aggression' based on a simple moral of paramount value: "peace is better."⁵⁵ And in so doing, Gülen and his community prove definitively that they are "on the side of peace at home and abroad." Fethullah Gülen (2004:250) deserves the last word:

The peace of this (global) village lies in respecting all these differences, in considering these differences to be part of our nature, and in ensuring that people appreciate these differences. Otherwise, it is unavoidable that the world will devour itself in a web of conflicts, disputes, fights, and the bloodiest of wars, thus preparing the way for its own end.

⁵⁵ The Qur'an, 4:128.

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