

The Gulen Movement: An Islamic Response to Terror as a Global Challenge¹

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Introduction

Whilst globalization seems to be winning the battle against both modern and traditional movements which were, until fairly recently, quite active on both the national and the regional levels, it is doubtful that the challenges brought about by globalization can be easily met by some of the world's stronger movements, some of which have been bred by the clashing visions of globalization itself (cf. Hoffman, 2002). To see history in its fullest form, one should be aware of the need for negotiating those clashing visions within globalization as well as the political agendas and transcripts – some of which are hidden – of the various players who may also possess other versions of reality in the context of making history (cf. Benjamin, 1969; Scott, 1990). Islam, as a universal religion struggling to maintain its cultural character and values as well as a secure place in the face of rapidly emerging global challenges, cannot exempt itself from the on-going clashes, part of which are not identified clearly enough as definitions and redefinitions of various concepts pertaining to globalization are still underway.

Controversy over Global Issues

Following the agreement signed by the Yalta Conference, the victorious leaders of World War II (February 1945), the old world order was succeeded

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by a new world order defined by bi-polarity and later represented by NATO and the Warsaw Pact. The rest of the world would fluctuate between the two global powers, through various alliances. The Cold War bipolar system, which preserved a form of political, economic and military balance [of power/of terror] between 'East' and 'West' for nearly fifty years, has been replaced by a US-dominated unipolar system following the collapse of the Soviet Union between 1989 and 1991. The rise of the US as the leader of this new historical epoch has also been accompanied by imposing labels that would define and, most probably, shape the transition emerging so rapidly after the Cold War. Sweeping generalizations of terms such as 'global terrorism,' 'fundamentalism,' 'Islamism,' 'Jihadism' (etc), would be widely covered by the Western media and used by Western politicians for demonizing terror-related activities and lauding globalization as a manifestation of free-market enterprises, although those terms were and will remain in search of a context in which they gain either negative or positive connotations.

Thus, covering Islam would be part of a campaign targeting Islamists or Muslim extremists libeled in the media as terrorists; and covering globalization would be part of the need to promote democracy, transparency, human rights, international business, international affairs, information technology networks, and so forth (cf. Said, 1997). Such terms with all their manifest or hidden agendas are part of global conflicting discourses and therefore they need to be revised and reexamined in light of the context from which they operate. Hence, there is some doubt about each of the items in question and whether or not they serve ideological, political or economic enterprises and policies across the world. This does not mean that the challenges brought about by these global clichés are not real. In fact, to meet such challenges for what they are, we need honest research in various disciplines to reveal the impact they pose on global stability. It is with the Muslim and non-Muslim scholars involved in academic research activities that such global terms can be placed in context and therefore become better understood if the world is ready to combat terrorism and expose the side effects of globalization as an irrevocable fate. So far, these terms, more especially globalization and terrorism, have not been fully exhausted when it comes to the comprehensive definitions we need to harbor, or use as a starting point for further field explorations of key terms. In contrast, terms such as 'national aspiration' and 'resistance,' for instance, have receded to the background or lost much of their meaning when 'tackled' as news, shot as part of film-making, or compiled as documents for archive material (Said, 2001; Chomsky, 2006; Pappé, 2006). Edward Said capture this well when noting that

the Islam before us is attenuated perforce by our power to represent it for our purposes, and reduced for the occasion by a state, a government, a group in response to us: this is far thing from Islam as such, and at present the encounter between "us" and "them" does neither very much credit. More

significantly, in what it covers it hides far more than it explicitly reveals (Said, 1997: 69).

Said's attempt to debunk the Western discourse that mistakes Islam for Islamism, or sees the two as interchangeable in the context of global challenges, is for the most part a matter of representation or rather (mis)presentation. This implies that Islam has not been well-studied or fully understood by Western scholarship, much less so by much of the Western media and Western political and cultural elites. Examples of this abound.³ Said's statement also implies a call for a constructive dialogue between the West and the Muslim World for a fuller understanding of the boundaries defining the agendas of the two camps which Fethullah Gulen does not see as adversarial in light of the global challenges undermining the stability of the international community. As a matter of fact, the Gulen Movement has long embarked on repositioning Islam, both as a faith and a way of life, in the world by reintroducing it as a strong contributor to domestic, regional and global stability. The practical side of the movement in Turkey and beyond is clearly manifested in the school education system adopted by Gulen and his followers.

The Gulen Movement: An Islamic Response to Global Challenges

Inspired by the Turkish Nursi Movement, M. Fethullah Gulen was among the few Muslim leaders, across the world, whose response to the challenges posed by global instability had been presented prior to the 9/11 attacks against New York and Washington.⁴ In fact, Gulen had already placed his movement in the context of accepting to meet the local and global challenges in a world defined, if not actually controlled, by the worldviews of secularists and their strong hold of the state and its functions in almost all the fields of human activity including: free trade, human rights, democratic institutions, international law (etc).⁵ In short, if a state is to be accepted as a sovereign equal, it must ape the Western model of the state or else it potentially faces being labeled 'rogue.'

³ Examples include Salman Rushdie's novel *Satanic Verses* (1988), Samuel Huntington's *Clash of Civilizations* (1993), and the Danish Jyllands Posten's cartoon drawings (2005) mocking Prophet Mohammad, to mention a few.

⁴ Reference to Said Nursi (1867-1960) who organized the Followers of Nour (Light) and called for the establishment of an Islamic state that would be based on Islamic law and ruled by the ulama (Muslim scholars). For further details about the influence of Nursi, see *Turkish Islam and the Secular State*, ed. H. Yavuz and J. Esposito, Syracuse University Press, 2003; and *Islam: Continuity and Change in the Modern World*, 2nd ed., John Voll, Syracuse University Press, 1982.

⁵ One of the economic and trade activities assigned and prescribed by globalization is abiding by the dictates of the International Standard Organization (ISO) for export/import commodity specification, without which a country cannot be part of the world free trade system. Another

In this context, religion would be reduced to an individual practice of worship, to recall Martin Luther's phrase "Everybody, his own priest," and not an institutional authority whose impact on the formation of power and government functions could be highly influential. Gulen, who views secularist worldviews as ineffective, and in this he concurs with Rodney Stark who argues that the theory of secularization as a social scientific faith "was the product of wishful thinking" (1999: 269), is cautious not to demonize the state, although he was prosecuted by the secularist state for his outspoken ideas as a religious activist who may have been a threat to the stability of *Kemalist* Turkey.⁶

Gulen, thanks to his Turkish experience, contends that religion has a significant say in building the spiritual contentment and welfare programs of a society, recalling the successive failures of the three military coups that took place in Turkey during the 1970s and 1980s. In an interview with Nuriye Akman, Gulen commented on the corruption of the secular state by saying that "(y)ou cannot call the people in charge to account. They are protected, shielded, sheltered, and thus they have been left alone" (Akman, 2004: 10).

However, Gulen's Turkish experience cannot be the whole story of the encounter between secularism and Islam when bigger challenges are in wait. This also goes beyond the wishful thinking of Abdul-Aziz Al-Naim (1990) who hoped for some type of "reconciliation between Islamic law and the benefits of secularism within a religious framework" (Ibid: 10). Yet the Turkish experience has not left Gulen without a vision. His hypothesis of the emerging mode of faith synthesized is quite note-worthy in the battle over the welfare of the Muslim community. It is not a 'fundamentalist' version, nor a 'secular' model as would be spelled out by modernist paradigms and idioms, but a cultural ideal nourishing on eternal spiritual virtues deriving from Islam as the youngest of the three world major monotheistic faiths. Gulen's mission to redefine and re-examine true religious values in terms of their relevance and socio-moral character as revealed in *Al-Qur'an* (the Muslim Holy Book), and preached by Prophet Mohammad's *Hadith*, is not an easy task to accomplish amidst countless problems, most of which range from the dire living conditions of the majority of Muslim population to security issues and identity politics.

Within this uneasy atmosphere of the clashing visions and interests trying to shape interconnected societies and cultures, Gulen and his followers have chosen to toil hard, in Turkey and elsewhere, to redefine Islam and reintroduce it to both Muslims and non-Muslims in a world that does not seem to have settled accounts with itself over globalization as a controversial term. To be more specific, since the first Gulf War (1991), and the collapse of the Soviet

activity on global level takes the form of adopting a liberal political system of the state whose manifest characteristics are democratic general election, transparency and accountability.

⁶ *Kemalists* are Turkish politicians and statesmen, followers of Kemal *Ataturk* (Turkish for father of Turks), the founder of the secular, modern republic of Turkey after World War I.

Union that occurred thereafter, the momentum in search for a new world order in which globalization assumed a prevailing role has not slowed down irrespective of the asymmetric global power relations that ended, unexpectedly, in the interest of the Western world led by the US.

However, a formidable global challenge appeared following 9/11. Terms such as ‘Islamist’ and ‘Islamism’ began to enter daily parlance – thanks to media and film industries – as the equivalent of ‘terrorist’ and ‘terrorism’ requiring international alliances as means of suppression and ultimately victory; militarily, politically and ideologically. Since those tragic attacks – which claimed nearly 3000 civilians and undermined the opportunity for a positive commencement to the 21st century – the entire international community, specifically the Islamic world,⁷ has been, in one way or another, embroiled in Bush’s ‘war on terror.’ Most (self-identified) Islamic countries, together with the rest of the international community, denounced the 9/11 attacks as acts of terror. Yet, state policies to combat terrorism have varied greatly despite the official outspoken statements released by various governments. The tides of support turned in response to successive Bush proclamations in the US Congress, and elsewhere, as waging the ‘war on terror’ was presented as a priority for all states, excluding none.⁸ The direct result of such a reprioritization was the military invasion and occupation, led by the US and its allies, of Afghanistan (2001) and Iraq (2003) respectively. Despite these actions, terrorism has not subsided, and the two conflicts continue to rage, claiming heavy damages to property and incalculable losses of human life.

In the ‘Islamic world,’ various responses to this global challenge have entered into the post-colonial structure of the state, cracking down on suspected underground activists, and at the same time maintaining oligarchic rule in collusion with the military. In some Islamic states, the state declared war against local ‘Islamist’ movements which have begun to fight back. Other states chose to withstand democratic change and have annulled the results of general elections which may have permitted some Islamic movements to take office, and assume political and administrative leadership.⁹ Still, other states seem to have tacitly connived at, if not colluded with, their in-house Islamic movements in

⁷ The term “Islamic world”, often referred to by the media and politicians in the West as something homogeneous, seems ambiguous and misleading, for the term cannot be true in light of the socio-cultural, political, religious and linguistic differences in the vast space encompassing Muslims and non-Muslims. For further illustration, see Edward Said’s *Covering Islam*, New York: Vintage Books.

⁸ See, for instance, President George W. Bush’s “Address to the Nation on U.S. Policy in Iraq” on January 10, 2007. The speech is available at: <http://whitehouse.gov/news/releases/html>.

⁹ I herein recall the “first” democratic experience in Algeria as regards the 1992 general election which was won by the Islamic groups/parties but the result was soon annulled by the Algerian military, and that gave rise to horrendous acts of violence across Algeria. Those Islamic groups did not have the chance to effect any change in the structure of the state and its various functions.

defense of Islam against global threats. The outcome was unexpected, however, for some Islamic countries have witnessed civil turmoil and social upheavals, and above all instability and a higher rate of violence as is the case in Iraq, Pakistan, Somalia, the Sudan – to name a few.

Some Islamic movements, including Gulen's, responded to the pressures of global challenges addressing terrorism in very different ways than their governments. Such Islamic movements, and the states from which they operate, might have viewed acts of terrorism in a similar way, but part ways over the means to combat terrorism. One of the reasons for the widening gap between secularist states and religious movements is the controversy over the specific meaning and definition of the term terrorism. In this respect, many religious movements, including Gulen's, have raised doubts about a conclusive definition of terrorism, and whether military occupation, forced expulsions, land-grabs and institutional acts of vigilantism,¹⁰ or sieges¹¹ conducted by some states are part of the working definition of terrorism.

In theory, and as a spontaneous reaction to 9/11, terrorism is denounced by both states and Muslim movements alike. However, when it comes to translating such reactions into a suitable definition of terrorism, states and Muslim movements differ substantially, as each transmits messages on different frequencies either to respond to Western agendas and its 'war on terrorism,' or challenge the West for some undeclared or hidden agenda whose emblem is the advancement of Islam.

Among the various responses issued by global Islamic movements that repudiated and denounced terrorism, Gulen's response has been the most articulate. Its emphasis on both Islamic faith and tradition provides, as he argues, effective transition to the new global era. Gulen's reaction to terrorism, as a global challenge, is mainly found in two books, one written by Gulen himself in 1993, the other edited by Unal and Williams in 2000: and the same reaction reappears with a little variation in Gulen's personal discourse regarding multiculturalism and pluralism. Gulen's followers assert that his vision has a positive impact on contemporary debates which attempt to shape the future of Muslims and non-Muslims alike through advancing inter-faith dialogue among key-representatives of major world religions.

What about the practical side of the Gulen Movement? In this respect, Yavuz (2003) recounts education as the most significant project for the cultivation of religious and scientific truths as well as cultural and humanistic values in younger generations in Turkey, among Turkish-speaking countries of Central

¹⁰ The Israeli Jewish immigrant settlers' confiscation of Palestinian land and private property and acts of terrorizing and humiliating civilians in the occupied Palestinian territories, serves as an example.

¹¹ The closure of border crossings of the Gaza Strip by both Israel and Egypt, serves as a good example.

Asia, and in the Turkish exilic communities in Europe and the US. The Gulen Movement has responded to static realities in Turkey for the sake of effecting some considerable change across the community. It has built hundreds of educational centers (schools and universities), social welfare centers and hospitals. Some schools have also been constructed in the Muslim Kurdish community of Northern Iraq. Gulen's unique leadership in the field of education, being an educator himself, has been highly commended as:

a combined ulama-intellectual persona, Gulen not only preaches inner mobilization of new social and cultural actors, but also introduces a new liberative [sic.] map of action.... His goals are to sharpen Muslim self-consciousness, to deepen the meaning of the shared idioms and practices of society, to empower excluded social groups through education and networks, and to bring just and peaceful solutions to the social and psychological problems of society (Yavuz, 2003: 19).

Although Gulen's Movement has been active across the Turkish social strata, its target population has been the middle class: business and media people who have been the most important sources of financing and supporting it in the ways needed to frame the Turkish national identity in terms of Islam, irrespective of ethnic differences dividing Turks and Kurds. Less targeted social classes in Turkey are marginalized and socially excluded groups. Turkish women, even without headscarves, have also been active members of the Gulen Movement.

The Gulen Movement's standpoint against violence within Turkey, and abroad, has been uniform as it derives anti-violent sentiments from Islamic teachings as prescribed in *Al-Qur'an* and *As-Sunna* (Arabic for Prophet's everyday practice and conduct). To Gulen, Islam throughout history "came to mean the same thing" (Gulen, 2004: 239), for the principal concepts and values cultivated by *Al-Qur'an* and preached and practiced by Prophet Mohammad have been the solid constituents of Islamic *Shari'a* (Arabic for jurisprudence and jurisdiction), and most of these provisions and regulations if properly observed do not conflict with international, secular law in the fields of human rights, freedom of thought and expression, education for all, peace based on active dialogue, and repudiation of all forms of violence. It is the last of these that needs to be further examined as it forms the basis of the argument posed in this research.

Gulen's Islamic Discourse

In Favor of Human Rights

During the Cold War one of the most potent weapons deployed by the West was the issue of human rights which were typically prioritized during any

negotiations between the leaders of each respective camp. Human rights are still being advanced by Western leaders and thinkers, even more forcefully now that Western-inspired globalization has come to determine, to a degree, the relations between states, has entered public rhetoric and is being thoroughly discussed at a multitude of international summits, and by various agencies of the UN. An Islamic response to human rights issues have been constantly communicated by Gulen and his followers as part of the Islamic message that ennoble the status of human beings, irrespective of race, color and gender. Gulen's immediate source in this regard is the word of God as revealed in *Al-Qur'an*.

O mankind, We have created you male and female, and appointed you races and tribes, that you may know one another; surely the noblest among you in the sight of God is the most God-fearing of you; God is All-knowing, All-aware (*Al-Hojorat, XLIX: 13*)

Commenting on the above *Qur'anic* verse in the context of human rights, Gulen asserts that "such an evaluation cannot be found in any other religion or any modern system ... or any human rights commission or organization" (2004: 34). As this principle defining human rights is universal, he contends, it is timeless and should be applicable to all human societies irrespective of cultural and/or religious differences. The meaning of this very verse is reiterated in different wording in many of the *Qur'anic Suras*¹² and *ayat*¹³ (See, for instance, *An-Nisa, IV: 93*), and the same meaning is carried extensively by Prophet Mohammad in his *Hadith*. Islam approaches human rights from the stance of the basic principles of freedom of faith, life, reproduction, mental health, and personal property – all to be preserved and observed even by force of Islamic law (See Tirmidhi, *Diyat: 22*; Abu Dawud, *Sunna: 32*). The Islamic principle of universal mercy can also be part of this context, for human life is highly honored and praised by God who confers on man the title of 'vicegerent.'

As for tolerance and dialogue, they are to be observed by true Muslims as prescribed in *Al-Qur'an* and preached by the prophet. There is no coercion into Islam as faith, and nobody is made a Muslim by force. Dialogue is the key-element that characterizes the relation between Muslims and non-Muslims, and accordingly this frames the inter-faith dialogue which Gulen advocates for a fuller understanding of the world major religions as they approach one another. The following *suras*, among others, call for a dialogue as a means to settle misunderstanding, disputes and conflicts:

Call thou to the way of thy Lord with wisdom and good admonition and dispute with them [non-Muslims] in the better way; surely thou Lord

¹² *Sura/Suras* (Arabic for *Qur'anic* chapter/chapters), 114 in all, of which *Al-Qur'an* as text is made.

¹³ *Aya/ayat* (Arabic for *Qur'anic* verse/verses) of which the *sura/suras* are made.

knows very well those who have gone astray from His way, and He knows very well those who are guided (*an-Nahl*, XVI: 125).

and

And the servants of the All-merciful are those who move on earth in humility, and when the ignorant address them, they say ‘peace’ (*Al-Furqan*, XXV: 63).

Against Terror

As regards tolerance and forgiveness, Gulen explains how true Muslims should behave towards the ‘other’ expecting nothing in return for their humane behavior. Against this conduct based on non-violence, a Muslim who performs his/her religious duties properly cannot be a terrorist; and here lies the power of Gulen’s Islamic discourse to correct the stereotypical image blemishing Islam under labels such as Islamists or extremists or terrorists which are commonly mistaken as interchangeable. In Islam, killing a human being is an abhorrent act that is equal in gravity to *kufir* (Arabic for blasphemy), as Gulen explains in many of his public speeches and articles. In the wake of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, Gulen issued a statement condemning the horrendous act and the perpetrators, naming Bin Laden as the most hateful to himself, for Bin Laden “has sullied the bright face of Islam” (Akman, 2004). He apologetically admits that “[e]ven if we were to try our best to fix the terrible damage that has been done it would take years to repair” (ibid).

If Islam is libeled as regressive, violent and reactionary by some influential media outlets, Gulen would attribute that to misunderstanding and ignorance. Such media must be mistaking a Muslim culture for the broader Islamic culture which is now non-existent and which badly needs to be revised by qualified Muslim scholars if the true image of Islam is to be addressed worldwide. If this is not done however, Gulen thinks that Muslims will not be able to contribute much to the balance of the world in the near future. He does not recognize the modern state, represented by current political regimes, as an effective tool for cleaning up the stain tarnishing the true image of Islam, for to him the Islamic State had long vanished since the Mongols ravished and burnt Baghdad, the capital city of the Islamic Abbasid Caliphate, in 1258. That central Islamic State was then succeeded by a number of Islamic emirates which in turn were conquered by the Ottomans who assumed leadership of the Muslim world until the outbreak of WWI (1914-1918), when the Ottoman Caliphate crumbled. He also holds the current apparatus of the state/regime in the Muslim world responsible for inadvertently raising or harboring fundamentalist groups due to the absence of educational curricula which ought to develop and promote the

concept of cultural awareness which enables learners to recognize and accept the ‘other’ for what the ‘other’ is irrespective of differences in religion, color, gender or race, as well as construct citizens who ought to be sensitive to the issues of fundamentalism and extremism.

Therefore We prescribed for the children of Israel that who so slays a soul not to retaliate for a soul slain, nor for corruption done in the land, shall be as if he had slain mankind altogether; and whoso gives life to a soul, shall be as if he had given life to mankind altogether (*Al-Maida, V: 32*).

He argues that “a real Muslim, one who understands Islam in every aspect, cannot be a terrorist ... for Islam does not approve of the killing of people in order to attain a goal ... and therefore all of these tenets and interpretations require revision and renovation by cultivated people in their fields” (Gulen, 2004). In an interview with Nuriye Akman (Zaman, 2004), Gulen admits that those terrorists have been raised among us, but they have been manipulated and turned into robots by professional criminals voicing themselves as Islamists. For Gulen, the situation could have been and still can be prevented by means of education.

There is a remedy for this [terror]. The remedy is to teach the truth directly. It should be made clear that Muslims cannot be terrorists. Why should this be made clear? Because people must understand that if they do something evil, even if it is as tiny as an atom, they will pay for that both here and in the Hereafter (Gulen, 2001).

In theory, the above quote sounds like a good policy in need of implementation in real-life situations. However, in the absence of a Muslim State that enforces Islamic laws; punishing acts of terror in relation to Islamic *Shari’a* (Arabic for law), to guarantee justice across the Muslim community, there are doubts that a secular state in the absence of *Shari’a* could ever succeed. Hence, there is a gap between Islamic policy and state practice when justice, as the end-goal, must be served.

It is a great shame, Gulen says, that Islam, whose tenets and values are universally addressed for the good of humanity, should be equated by others with terrorism. “This is an enormous historical mistake” (*Turkish Daily News*, 2001). Terms like *Jihad/Jihadism*¹⁴ are being abused by both Muslims and non-Muslims for hidden agendas. Islam advances the cause of *Jihad* in two ways. The first is the *greater Jihad* against the internal enemy of a Muslim; that is, the individual instinctive tendency to do evil which one must fight to maintain an upright and righteous Muslim status. In this respect, I recall

¹⁴ *Jihad* (Arabic for struggle), and not Jihadism or Jihadists, is the term *Al-Qur’an* prescribes for Muslims to observe and carry out in case of self-defense to maintain the word of God and the global mid-most position of the Islamic *Umma* (Arabic for nation).

Sigmund Freud's concept of hostility and aggression being part of the human instinctive life which must be curbed and constantly checked by rules and laws set by civilization in the service of its cultural ideals (Freud, 1937). The second is the *lesser Jihad* against the external enemy of the Islamic *Umma* (Arabic for nation) where the violence used in the context of self-defense is legitimate and strongly recommended.

God has preferred in rank those who struggle [in the path of God] with their possessions and their selves over the ones who sit at home (*An-Nisa'*, IV: 95).

And in another *Surah*

Thus we appointed you a midmost nation that you might be witnesses to the peoples, and that the Prophet might be a witness to you; and fight in the path of God with those who fight with you, but aggress not; God loves not the aggressors (*Al-Baqarah*, II: 190).

In the same vein, Islam preaches patience and wise thinking and warns Muslims of taking any news for granted lest they do harm to the innocent.

O believers, if an ungodly man comes to you with a tidings, make clear, lest you afflict a people unwittingly, and then repent of what you have done (*Al-Hojorat*, XLIX: 6).

As far as forms of violence are handled as real challenges in the context of globalization, Fethullah Gulen has constant recourse to *al-Qura'an* and *al-Hadith* for a solution, thus by repudiating acts of violence and terror across the globe, he is also voicing the position of true Islam in a world that needs to understand Islam as it is – a global message of peace, tolerance, and forgiveness. However, the Gulen Movement which has chosen to reactivate and revitalize Islam through education, and has so far succeeded in gaining followers and supporters in Turkey and beyond, has also chosen to distance itself from politics and the functions of the modern state. In the long run, the educational project, together with other community service projects, could be rewarding enough to place the movement as a force of change on local and global levels. However, not much of this is guaranteed along this path. The Gulen Movement, whose chief executive officer is one man, Gulen himself, needs to redefine the managerial functions of its hierarchal organizational structure by turning itself into an institution governed by the most effective tools of modern management, above all of which come accountability and strategic planning. Otherwise, the Movement would only enjoy a short life-span, which could be as long as the life span of its founder. Other Turkish Islamic and quasi-Islamic movements may have been influenced by the Gulen Movement, but they are fairing much better in trying to transform Turkey into a modern nation-state, a regional influential

state, and perhaps a player in global power relations. If one of the global challenges facing Turkey and Turkish Islamic movements is the reaffirmation of its identity as a secularist/Muslim country (99% Muslim population), there should be a dialogue leading to an ‘inter-marriage’ between Islam and secularism.

Alternative Perspectives

Unless the Gulen Movement reexamines its strategy as an effective popular leverage of transforming the Turkish state and society into a modern Muslim nation, it would be simply referred to as one of those movements which tried to encourage a change but fell short of achieving its stated mission. In a secularist state like Turkey where the *Kemalists* and the military still exercise power, the chances for apolitical Islamic movements to effect a radical change across the secularist institutions shaping the state and the nation would be quite slim. Political parties and activists, like the *Refah* and the *Fazilet*, have tried to do that over the last two decades of the Twentieth Century but have been banned by law for the potential threat they were accused of posing against the secular state. The *Justice and Development Party*, currently in power, is almost facing the same fate although it has won the general election with majority of votes in the Turkish Parliament, and has succeeded in electing one of its key-leaders, Abdullah Gul, as President of the Republic. Accordingly, if the Gulen Movement keeps distancing itself from the democratic process of power relations, despite all the achievements it has made in the fields of education, public health, and the media, it would be hard for such a movement to gain a solid position capable of effecting a radical change across the Turkish community. Islamic ideals and values build the Muslim character, and quality education builds careers, but these may not be competitive enough to transform a nation, like Turkey, in the short run. The *Justice and Development Party* had already won many city councils and municipalities – Tayyip Recep Erdogan, himself, was elected mayor of Istanbul before assuming power as Prime Minister – on the eve of preparing for the general election.

Concluding Remarks

Although the Gulen movement has been struggling to correct the image of true Islam to both Muslims and non-Muslims alike, much more can be done to translate Gulen’s ideas into practice for a real transformation of the supra-structure of the Turkish state. Advocating and monitoring high quality education at school and university levels, together with sponsoring public health centers and hospitals, and gaining a foothold in the field of media (newspapers and television stations), are all effective means to address Islamic culture to the new generations in Turkey and Turkish-speaking communities elsewhere.

Gulen's attempt to revitalize Islam as a force of change is highly potential and practical but it needs time to meet local and global challenges.

On the global level, the theoretical ideas of the Gulen Movement have begun to gain some, but not enough, Western recognition, and this in particular is owed to Gulen's residence in the US since the 1980s, and the facilities his residence has offered him as lecturer, public speaker and writer in the field of Islamic faith and culture. Advancing the cause of peace, tolerance and forgiveness as human values fostered by Islam, Gulen has chosen to sustain these global values through quality education, for both genders, on the basis of equal opportunity. For Gulen, the goal of quality education is to improve the life of the people who join his schools and through them for the wider community. In so doing, Gulen is trying to counter the global campaign mistaking, and eventually mis-presenting, Islam and Muslims as sponsors of violence and terror targeting global stability and world peace. However, it would be oversimplified to call the Gulen Movement a radical force of change, effective enough to meet all global challenges, especially when terror-related activities carried out by Muslim extremists or other militants who may also claim to be operating in the same name.

Any alternative of Gulen's Movement cannot be far from its sincere attempt to renovate religion as a potential contributor to global peace and equilibrium in the face of global challenges. Equally important is the need on the part of the West to re-examine its preconceptions about Islam. For the West to meet the likes of Gulen Movement halfway, both camps alike, as Norman Daniel has put it, need to identify prejudices and misconceptions which have for a long time added to the dim pictures drawn about one another (Daniel, 1993). Globalization, seemingly a positive trend, advanced by technology and openness, is in fact the creation of powerful, capitalistic countries through the agency of global business tycoons – bankers and shareholders of world financial centers as well as media networks, oil companies and weaponry magnates – who plan to keep control of the world, once by making wars and very often by creating scarecrows and puppet governments to intimidate 'rogue' countries and secure the biggest market share for their businesses, even if those businesses prove to be globally detrimental.¹⁵ Those who claim to be seeing the current global picture in a different way may be misreading the fullest picture of history, to recall Benjamin, in an attempt to voice themselves as 'independent scholars'.

¹⁵ Reference goes to the current international financial crisis starting in the United States as early as 2007 with real estate stocks going down, worsening with Wall Street crisis in the summer of 2008, and the subsequent impact on the global financial, economic, and social stability.

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